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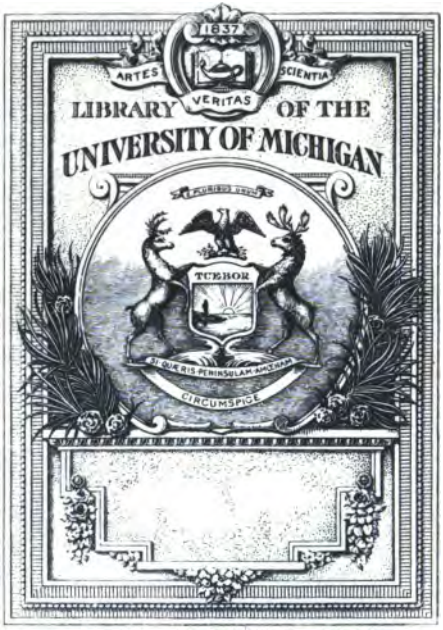
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THE

LIFE OF A LOVER.

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS.

BY SOPHIA LEE.

Honour, that spark of the celestial fire
Which above nature makes mankind aspire,
Ennobles the rude passions of our frame.
* * * * * * * * * * * *
The richest treasure of a gen'rous breast,
Which gives the stamp and standard to the rest.
MARQ. OF HALIFAX.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

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THE

LIFE

OF A

LOVER.

LETTER XCVII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

WHAT a letter have you sent me, my Amelia! Was an addition wanting to my sufferings?—and must it come from you, too? Merciful Heaven, where will they end! This trying letter has given me severe convulsions, and reduced me to the verge of the grave: after hovering between that and life for many hours, Heaven justly punishes me with the last; and I once more am able to repine.

I need not add how vain has been all your advice. I had made myself every way a wretch, at the very moment when you were so generously intent to prevent me. Can you, then, still resolve to love her whom you so severely censure? Alas! is there one human being to whom I am yet dear! I dare not venture to turn my eyes inward; your letter is engraven upon my heart, and they read there only that: it destroys all the feeble gratification which this miserable marriage could promise to me: it has, indeed, dissipated my tempestuous passions; but, alas! it shows at the same moment the ruin with which they have encompassed me.

Rash, arrogant, infatuated fool! Oh, I have laid up for myself a fund of everlasting sorrow! All your dreadful presages are re-echoed back by mine.—Yes, I feel that I have, indeed, sunk myself below the man who insulted me; and even in the very instance in which I meant to soar above him; for Lord Westbury may

be happy enough to have forgotten me—I never can him.

Alas! you have opened my eyes to a yet more hideous apprehension. I fancy now that I see something I cannot endure in Colonel Percival's looks. The sound of his voice disconcerts me. If he takes my hand, it chills in his, or shrinks from him with a sensation of horror: and if Miss Egerton seems going to leave us together but a single moment, I can hardly repress the strong impulse which urges me to fly after, or bring her back again. The man who, while he had no power over me, I ever considered with politeness and composure, in the present point of view is the source of continual terror and disgust. Fears fill my life in his presence, and tears out of it: yet I guard my ingratitude as carefully as possible from his observation, lest that should tempt him to deserve it.

Sir George Harington (encouraged, I presume, by the supposed folly of his

old friend) has taken this opportunity of paying his *devoirs* to Miss Egerton, who listens to him very cordially. He is near forty years older than herself. On my mentioning this, she asked me, with a home smile, "what the world would think if they knew from whom that objection came?" The pang I felt made her generous heart ache. Mrs. Egerton talks daily of going to town, where Sir George's lawyers are to meet hers. I, alone, seek to delay this dreaded journey. I hourly implore Sophia not to leave me with her uncle. She seems my only protection; and, God forgive me! but I have taken it into my head that he hurries the match, on purpose to be left with me. Miss Egerton makes very kind promises; but how can I rely on what is alike opposite to her duty and her inclination? Still I hang on her, like a drowning wretch, for I have no one else to hold.

Oh! if Mr. Forrester does censure me, tell him the whole truth. He is too

compassionate not to feel for me; and has enjoyed too amply the pleasures of love, not to guess at its sorrows.

No more, from this moment, of Lord Westbury. Never, never, voluntarily, shall my lips pronounce that name! never shall my pen transcribe it! Be happiness his portion—forgetfulness mine. I have sufficiently punished myself in ceasing to blame him; and have, unhappily, an object yet more deserving my resentment in your

CECILIA!

LETTER XCVIII.

TO FRANCIS TREVILIAN, ESQ.

Bromley-Grove.

I DARE believe, that, were I to exhaust my rhetoric, I should still never be able to convince you it was not an Endymion-like prank which made me follow my Diana. But how little can people

guess at the motives of our actions! I was very quietly at home, where I very quietly meant to remain, when Lord Winchester, clapping his six Flanders mares to his tawdry chariot, announced to me, by an *avant-courier*, the honour of a visit. I was known to be at Arlington before I had a choice; and the good-natured old peer was so fixed on taking me back with him, that, not having or expecting any company to excuse my refusal, I was obliged to go, or be downright rude: and so here I am, much to my own surprise, and not less to that of the disagreeable Countess: who, as she does not know to which peer to lay the charge of the intrusion, scowls gloriously on us both. Her lovely daughter, on the contrary, received me with equal pleasure and surprise; and easily relapsed into the habit of familiarity. For my own part, I resolved to let Fortune take her course, and profit by her favours without risquing her insults.

Continual parties of the neighbouring

families have left us little leisure to remember, till now, that we had hearts. Three days ago I understood that Lord Winchester had engaged himself to attend a county meeting, where he reckoned upon my company: but not having the same reason for sacrificing my senses to rustic popularity, and being out of all hope of finding society, wit, or pleasure, in a circle of that kind, I pleaded indisposition, and resolved to stay at home. My intention, it was obvious, deranged their plans, as the two ladies were to have joined another party; yet to leave an avowed invalid alone, was more than even the frosty Lady Winchester could resolve upon. A council was called of the ancients; while I invoked, with a true Parnassian fervour, all the Loves and the Graces, for hours together, that the matron might not be inspired with the severe discretion of mortifying me by staying at home herself, rather than indulging me with her daughter's company. For once, my petitions were heard: the par-

son's wife and daughter happening to favour us with a morning visit, they were detained to dinner, and Lady Diana left to—entertain them. The dear creature so strictly considered my health at table, that I was obliged to own the truth to her;—and, oh, how her cheeks glowed! I was never more gay; and guilty of a solecism towards the doctor's lady, by objecting in the evening to cards. Robbed of her daily amusement, Heaven inspired that good woman with an apprehension of bad weather; and early in the evening she and her daughter made their exit; though not till Miss had driven every harmonious idea out of my head, by an execrable performance, vocal and instrumental, with which she treated us. Lady Diana has neither voice nor ear; of course, I make it a point not to remind her of the defect, by pretending to any taste or skill in music. Yet not to love that melting science, argues a defect in the soul, as well as organs: I am sorry she has no fondness, at least, for that

"concord of sweet sounds." Oh, I have heard a voice so mellifluous, expressive, and touching, that each note seemed rather produced by intuition, than study and practice!

Lady Diana, however, draws very finely; and, to amuse myself (I had like to have said us), I sketched her. Perhaps you never knew my turn that way?—but how could I pass my lonely days if I had not some such resources? I am not, however, very vain of my talent, as you may guess, since I have thus accidentally brought it to light: that was a folly of which Cornbury cured me. Never do I find my patience or veracity more tried, than when he drags me to his painting-room; and, peering intently through the circle of his finger and thumb, at daubs which make me shut my eyes, cries, with a self-flattering tone, "is not this delicately finished?—mark the perspective!—but, above all, I pique myself on attitude, colouring, and grace. Upon the whole, I have no reason to be ashamed of this."

Were not lying sanctified under the term of politeness, what would hinder us from telling him—" no, you need not, but any body else would." But let us have done with that wretched egotist Cornbury, and once more return to Lady Diana; crying her mercy for this unconscionable digression. I had the happiness which makes the fortune of artists, and took a very flattering likeness of her: but, alas! while thus employed I made a discovery that I should be glad to unknow. Her figure is not good; her chest and shoulders want that easy grace:—in short, I know one form so far beyond hers, that all the sweet Diana's charms of face make not up for the difference. The critical eye which we cast on the figure, while drawing it, takes away all the advantages it receives from dress and motion; leaving it only symmetry, or showing the want of it. I never thought before, that I could be justly termed partial to Lady Diana; and, alas! my cold heart said only that I had been so.

Lord Winchester returned sooner than his lady, and something elevated with wine: he unluckily chose to rally his daughter and me on our *tête-à-tête*. Neither my gravity nor Lady Diana's blushes could restrain his tongue; so that she held it wisdom to make her escape. The indirect hints which the old peer afterwards gave of my making love to her, required some answer on my part. I therefore observed, "that he ought rather to wonder I could suppress (as I had ever done) the gallantry natural to the occasion, and due to the lady; but that he knew her as capable of inspiring respect as esteem." "Don't tell me of respect and esteem," returned he in a drowsy tone; his eyes twinkling and opening between every other word, like a dying lamp: "you know that you have bowed and smiled the girl out of her heart, with all her mock modesty and yours too. However, God bless you both together!"—and down sank he, fast asleep on the sopha.

By the morning, the noble Lord had

forgotten all the conversation of the evening; but as neither his daughter nor myself were in his condition, we remembered it perfectly well, and most foolishly we felt and behaved.

Even you will, perhaps, wonder why I cast away so fair an opportunity of ascertaining my fate. Hear the reasons of my silence, lest you accuse me of coldness, while others impute to me too general a rage for pleasure. Possessing by nature a heart overflowing with tenderness, and a strong bias for domestic happiness, my first plan was overturned by an injudicious choice. My affections, repelled thus, gave place to coldness and contempt: I even scorned to owe an heir to a woman who would have again worn me out with complaints, whims, and vanity. I was thrown, therefore, upon the mercy of the merciful fair ones. My rank and youth made me an object of some attention in the circle of gallantry. Often did I pursue women from mere curiosity; nor can I boast that I found my opinion

of the sex much raised in the main. However, whether I succeeded or not, the world allowed me to have done so; and I was brought into fashion, as most people are, by my follies and my vices. To the women who really deserved my esteem, I made an atonement for the doubt, in the respect and attention of my future conduct; and so completely is the female sex levelled by mode, that I sometimes discovered diamonds where others look only for dross. Thus I learnt, in time, to think highly of my own judgement, and determine at a glance. I did so with regard to Lady Diana: an unspeakable something, which I should call a pure radiation of the soul but that I have seen it where the soul wanted purity, gave me a mild esteem, a touching veneration for her; like the attachment which a darling sister ever inspires. The self-command which we can easily preserve while the passions are at rest, made me resolve never, by one effort, to insinuate myself into her favour. In fact, I have often seemed

more light, immoral, and absurd, in the fair Diana's eyes, than in those of any other of her sex. What tender regrets have those charming eyes at intervals expressed! She had no right to reprove my errors, but she took the soft and touching privilege of weeping for them.

When first the Duke of Fernham became—(what shall I call him? I am hardly entitled to say my rival)—a lover of Lady Diana's, I found my vanity so warmed, that it almost took the colouring of tenderness; and had not the freezing looks of Lady Winchester repelled me, I doubt not but that I should have offered to her daughter a heart not at my own disposal, and then cursed my stars for an age afterwards. This gust of pride blown over, I remembered, that, if the sweet Diana could be influenced to accept the Duke, she would want that love for me which alone could make us happy; and I should best discover this, by leaving her to her own judgement. If, uninfluenced by me, she refused the Duke, so distinguishing a

mark of her preference would entitle her to my whole heart, and stimulate me to deserve hers. We were both young enough to allow time for this experiment; and, in short, to own the whole truth, I always thought that it would be early enough to make a declaration, whenever it should be absolutely necessary. To the world, the recent loss of my wife would account for my silence. Yet I was fully sensible that there are modes of conveying your sentiments, as expressive as language. The woman whom you once resolve to marry, may reasonably expect that her heart, at least, should be satisfied of your intention. But I was only obliged to be strictly just; and that, you will admit, I have been; though, during the whole of my intimacy in her father's family, I have certainly considered Lady Diana as my future love,—if I may use the term.

Lady Diana knew not, as I have told you, how to look, after the ridiculous adventure with her father, and therefore shut herself up the next day till dinner;

when she appeared, with an over-acted gaiety which nothing that passed made necessary; and then she fell into a new embarrassment. Her mother's severe eye, I could perceive, gave me all the credit of her confusion; and, scarce did the dessert appear, ere the old lady rose to retire; in a sharp tone bidding her daughter follow. The sweet girl turned at the door, with eyes ready to overflow; and would have been heartily glad of her father's company and mine, rather than none. I know not how the two ladies spent the afternoon, but they appeared no more below. I saw the younger at her mother's dressing-room window; and, expressing by signs the beauty of the sky, invited her to walk, or let me drive her. She sighed, shook her head, and, sitting down, fixed her attention on a book she held. I then called for my phaeton; nor did I return till late in the evening; when I found some neighbouring gentlemen with Lord Winchester.

The next morning I received an early

compliment from my host, inviting me to breakfast in his study. This was delivered to me in the garden; and, when I reached the house, on the portico steps I saw Lady Diana. By paying her the compliments of the day, I obliged her to raise her fine face, which a large bonnet almost covered; when I perceived that her cheeks were wet with recent tears, while deeply they glowed as she became sensible of my observing look. Holding both her hands tenderly in mine, I inquired if she was indisposed. "In mind alone, my Lord," returned she; and, catching her hands eagerly from me, ran down the flight of steps. I was unwilling to keep her father waiting, or I should have pursued my inquiry; taking it for granted, that a discreet woman never confesses to any man a chagrin which she is not willing to account for, unless in a transport of passion, and very rarely then.

I found Lord Winchester formally seated in his splendid new library, sur-

rounded with the wise of all ages, arrayed most gorgeously in morocco and gold, and not the worse for their present owner's use of them. Our conversation was prefaced, as most of those which interest us are, by our running over every trifling and foreign occurrence. But, at length, the servants having withdrawn, the peer hastily asked me if I had seen Lady Diana that morning. I answered, that we had met upon the steps as I came in from the garden.

"You have no idea, Lord Westbury," cried the old peer, with an important air, "of the uneasiness which she gives me and her poor sick mother. I wanted to advise with you about her, which made me breakfast here this morning. You are sensible that this daughter is our only hope; the sole heiress, not only of a noble estate, but of all our family honours: for it was a promise long since made to me, that, in consideration of my faithful services, my daughter should be created a peeress whenever I desired it. This was a great

object, a very great object; and I was exceedingly guarded from that moment as to disposing of her. Indeed, I rather wished that she might remain single till she grew blooming and healthy, for fear she should produce me a puny race of grandsons. Situated as I have long been in France, I could have married her into the first families; but I loved my own country, my own title, my own way. Luckily, Diana detested foreign alliances as much as myself: but now she is of years to choose; and many great matches among our own nobility have offered; but her mother wrote word that she still desired to be excused: I began to be seriously uneasy. Her foolish dislike to matrimony, seems to me only to gain ground since she came home. What splendid offers we have had from the Duke of Fernham! and he already has a son: of course, his eldest by my daughter would inherit her title—the thing on earth I wish. Lady Winchester was very highly and justly incensed at Lady Diana's refusal of the

Duke; and, from her representations, I judged it time to obtain my recal, and interfere. When, however, I questioned Diana, I could get nothing out of her but the worn-out answer, that she did not like him. Is he not young, rich, handsome? of a noble family and splendid fortunes, child? said I.—'It may be so,' answered she, like a mere infant: 'but, dear papa, I never can like him.' Judge, now, whether this was not provoking?"

Here paused the old peer, as expecting my answer: nor could I settle precisely what that ought to be, but prudently resolved to qualify.

"Had a lady of weak understanding so replied, my Lord, you would have had cause for displeasure; but your charming daughter acts, on all occasions, so conformably to reason and duty, that even a slighter objection when made by her would be unanswerable."

"Why, you have adopted much the same style with herself!" cried the passionate peer. "How do I know, if she

goes on this way, whether she will ever condescend to like any lover whom I and her mother can approve? and then, after all our anxieties, we are to humour her whims by the extinction of our families. We must be fine fools, indeed! I remember, when you appeared in the world first, that I wished she had been old enough to marry you, and strengthen our family connexion: but you lost no time in getting a wife. When we all met in France, the thought again came across me; but I have never known what either you or Diana have been about. It is true, that I have asked her twenty times; but she blushes, cries, and frets, as if her heart were breaking; yet gives me no direct answer. Perhaps from your Lordship I may meet more candour. Is there any attachment between you, avowed, or otherwise? I am too proud to offer my daughter to any man, even were his rank royal; although, with her advantages, Lady Diana Selwyn is a match for a prince."

What was to be done with this odd soul?—I could not guess. After a moment's hesitation, I replied: "To deny that I have for Lady Diana Selwyn a very high and partial esteem, would be as absurd as unnecessary; but be assured, my Lord, that I have never made her a single profession, inconsistent with the decorum which my present situation requires."—Why should not I avail myself of my sables, Frank?

"Well, well," cried he, peevishly; "we can dispense with these punctilios between ourselves. If you have really the regard you acknowledge for my daughter, I own that I should infinitely prefer you to the Duke of Fernham; and so, I fancy, would Diana too. As your family and mine are of the same stock, and our titles of the same creation, to unite them, will add lustre to each: and, in saying this, I am not conscious of stooping, since I will take care that your Lady shall give your second son a name as noble as you can give your first."

Here was a plaguy stroke! The old peer, by this unexpected bluntness, obliged me to decide; and either take for life, or resign, the amiable subject of the debate. Had I not more esteemed the charming girl than I did either of her parents, my answer would not have been difficult; since it was evident that they rather sought to match their title than their daughter; and I had a shrewd suspicion that their sole reason for preferring me to the Duke was, because mine held only an equality with theirs, which would have been lost under that of the Duke of Fernham's. With many men, no doubt, a consideration like the one which Lord Winchester suggested, would have had weight; and, rather than not have given rise to two families so distinguished, they would have risqued their whole happiness: but never did I know so poor an ambition. Rather would I wish that the rank I inherit should end in myself, than that it should curse posterity, by descending to a miser, a prodigal, or

a fool, even though I were certain that no other man than myself gave him existence—a circumstance very problematical among the peerage at present. Lady Diana, however, was an angel; and a delicate sense of her situation determined me to be as explicit as her father.

"That man," replied I to the impatient peer, "who finds himself permitted to hope to win a heart like Lady Diana's, must be utterly insensible of merit, were he not enraptured; even did your charming daughter not comprise in herself those adventitious rights which doubtless have some weight in the judgement even of the most generous. Allow me, my Lord, without undervaluing these, to say, that had Lady Diana only the advantages which she owes to nature, she would not have been less desirable in my eyes. If, therefore, on a further knowledge of each other, I should be happy enough to obtain her of herself (for I would not owe the hand of an angel to parental authority), and to feel my own heart de-

serving such a treasure as I believe hers to be—which, I will candidly own, it is not at present, from a recent and unconquered passion—I will then, with transport and gratitude, receive the honour which you so partially wish me, and place my whole happiness in forming that of the sweet Diana. But if, on the contrary, I should neither be fortunate enough to feel nor to inspire that generous tenderness which forms, to thinking minds, the strongest tie in matrimony, I flatter myself that this candour will entitle me to your Lordship's esteem and regard, even should I never have a nearer claim to it."

"Answered like a man of honour," cried the delighted peer, shaking my hand as if he meant to dislocate my shoulder. "Aye, aye; take time to know one another better: you have some reason to be afraid of matrimony, and I like your prudent consideration: besides, my daughter is well born, and that will enable her to bear a more serious examination. Had you done so when you married the par-

son's daughter, you might have been a bachelor yet perhaps. Well, now I look on this important affair as concluded: I was, I own, anxious to come to some explanation, that I might answer the Duke, who presses his addresses very warmly, and has my Lady's whole interest. But when I propose you to her, I doubt not but she will acquiesce in my choice. Poor woman! she is mighty anxious to see her daughter equally matched, before she dies. You know her family, and all its noble alliances—and 'faith, between ourselves, she has a kind of foolish fondness for it, though married to me."

How could I keep my countenance at this exquisite blindness? However, he kindly placed my smile to the account of the absent. Indeed, I much doubt whether I should not have better pleased him, if, in the former part of my speech, I had turned my compliment on his title, rather than on his daughter. As I approached the conclusion, where, you may

observe, I in a manner unsaid all that I had advanced, I was so afraid of disconcerting him, that I almost disconcerted myself. But whether his Lordship was resolved to understand only that part of my declaration which corresponded with his views, or imputed the doubts I latterly expressed merely to my diffidence, it is certain, by the turn of his conversation afterwards, that he took no notice of the saving clause, and treated me as Lady Diana's declared lover, which I, of course, thought a little unreasonable.

I have my surmises that poor Diana had had "the slow truth wrung from her," as the only means of escaping the Duke; and her father and mother were resolved to make sure of me, before they declined his proposals. Lady Winchester guessed not, I am certain, at the old peer's summary mode of arranging this; since, were her daughter dying, she could not be brought to consent to such a diminution of her dignity, as the proposing her to any man. Nor do I doubt, but

that on repeating to his lady our conversation, my good friend enlarged on whatever I had said of a flattering nature, totally omitting every thing likely to offend; for the frigid face of the Countess softened into one of her dismal smiles all day.

Thus am I almost hampered in the noose of matrimony, while I was only amusing myself with examining the links of that eternal chain: yet I cannot but feel the distinction I owe to the family; for it was no boast of Lord Winchester to say, that he could marry his daughter into any rank below royal: nevertheless, I did not think it necessary to be more explicit till I changed my mourning. Indeed, I rather thought it would be an indelicacy toward Lady Diana: but her eager father was resolved not to allow either of us the arrangement of an affair that so nearly concerned both; and no sooner saw the house of Winchester within hope of an heir, than he thought it an age till that hope could be realised.

He and I dined abroad; and, on our

return, found Governor Fortescue (Lady Winchester's youngest brother), his lady, and two daughters; who had arrived in the interim. I make no doubt that I had been the subject of their conversation; for, on my entering the drawing-room, the whole party surveyed me with that cool, scrutinising air, which people assume who have a right in the object that attracts their attention. The rosy bloom on Lady Diana's cheeks confirmed this suspicion. She was elegantly dressed in plain white, and sat between two charming foils, her mother and her aunt, on the sopha: yet an air of sadness and humiliation softened her beauty, and made it highly interesting. Ah, lovely Diana! thought I, have I occasioned this depression? and my heart expanded towards her with a sensation so tender, that you would have supposed it to be love. I remained standing before the three ladies while I talked, till Mrs. Fortescue opportunely changed her seat, and Lady Winchester condescendingly desired her daughter to remove, and give me a

place between them. How exquisitely did Lady Diana's confusion increase! her eyes were immoveably fixed on the carpet, and her voice, in replying to me, scarce above a whisper. I was the more at leisure to observe this, as the party had gathered towards the windows to criticise some alteration now making in the gardens, on which Lord Winchester desired their judgement. They all followed him to the lawn, and the old Countess arose; her daughter rose too, though like a person who hardly dared to do it. Her mother turned towards her, with a tart voice and air—"You have walked too much already to-day, Diana: Lord Westbury complains that he is tired: you would not leave him alone?" I bowed, and, resuming my seat, the old lady rejoined the company, who descended into the shrubbery.

I must have been a blockhead, indeed, if I had not perceived that this was an arrangement on the part of the antiques of the family; and that my omit-

ting to declare myself, would cruelly wound the feelings of the young lady, as well as those of her parents. Yet to be a mere tool in the hands of a proud peer; to have no choice, hardly indeed any voice, in what so immediately concerned myself, roused a little of the Clifford pride in me. Ah! could I cast my eyes upon Lady Diana, and not sacrifice it to her! The lovely creature appeared half insensible, from excess of sensibility. Oh, delicacy! how powerful is thy influence!—how at once did it soften, win, chasten, my heart! Partaking of her exquisite distress, I had only recollection enough left to re-assure her, by repeatedly kissing and pressing to my bosom a lovely hand which inattention had thrown near mine: but, with inimitable grace, she drew it from me; and, becoming perfectly alive to a situation from which she could not possibly escape, she threw herself on the arm of the sopha, and indulged in those tears which she had long with difficulty suppressed. My soul was in

my voice, when I implored her to tell me in what manner I had offended her whom it was my only wish to please. I again seized her hand, and, with the agreeable violence of a lover, I detained it, in spite of her efforts. She started up, and, with a faltering voice, entreated that I would allow her to withdraw; adding, with a softer tone, and yet fuller blush, "Oh, how have I exposed myself!"—"How poorly, Lady Diana," cried I, throwing my arms round her, to prevent her leaving the room, "must you think of me, when you censure yourself! Do more justice to your own delicacy, and that of the man before you. I partake the touching distress produced by your sensibility; but, believe me, I would never have occasioned it. Parents may overlook the important trifles which give charms to life; but I hoped Lady Diana would be aware, that I shall always endeavour to keep them in mind."

"Ah, Lord Westbury!" cried she, withdrawing from me to fall into her for-

mer seat and relapse into tears, "there, there is my affliction! They have ruined me in your esteem—they have made me look little in your eyes!"

"How fruitless would have been the attempt, had it been possible that any one should make it. Your exalted character sets report at defiance: it asserts itself in every word and action, tincturing them all with your own perfection of purity."

"It is not even in your power, my Lord, by the sweetest flattery, to reconcile to itself a heart which is thus compelled to violate its own decorums and those of the world. I own that it has been my wish to preserve a merit in your eyes, to win your esteem, and perhaps" (covering her face with her handkerchief to hide her beautiful confusion) "I was vain enough to imagine I had obtained it. To hope—to hope——"

"Whatever the generous hope of that generous nature," returned I, kissing respectfully the hand which she no longer

drew from me, "Lady Diana was not born to hope any thing in vain. I have permitted myself to hope, that on some future day she will not disdain my heart; and it shall learn to cherish no other wish than that of meriting such a condescension. But should I be unfortunate enough" (for I saw her tears flow down anew) "to give her pain, it shall be by her own choice if ever I do so again."

"Alas!" returned she, "you do indeed give me pain, my Lord: every thing you say, every thing I think, gives me pain. What must you imagine of a weakness that could lead a spirit as proud as my father's to propose——Oh, Lord Westbury! leave me: I claim nothing from your generosity; I cannot submit to become the object of your pity, since I was never that of your tenderness. It is long since I have been obliged to discover that I was not born to the happiness of making you happy; but now I lose all voice in my own fate. They would tear me from myself—they would

cast me away on another!—Ah! what am I saying!"

"What everlastingly ensures my gratitude and respect. You wrong yourself, my lovely cousin, my dear Diana! Nature formed you surely for the generous purpose of your heart—to recal to the right, one which has been accidentally erroneous; to pity its failures, assuage its disappointments, cultivate its virtues! You are candour itself; nor will think the disclosure which it dictates, any fault in me. Yes: I will begin an attachment that may probably end but with our lives, by a frank confession. It was, long since, my unhappiness to cherish an ardent passion for a woman, who has since proved the most culpable and ungrateful of her sex. I followed her to France: it seemed that I went thither, only to give myself the agonising conviction of her worthlessness. Yet a love rooted like mine, could not suddenly be removed, even by merit like Lady Diana Selwyn's. Still my soul cherished your esteem, and became daily

more sensible of all your variety of charms: I knew that I could never be too sensible of them. Well I could calculate the dignity of your mind; nor should I have had a fear in entrusting my fate in your hands, but that I dared not be thus explicit. Chance, or rather a combination of occurrences, oblige me, too hastily, to lay at your feet this wayward heart, with all its imperfections. Deign, oh deign to accept it! and make it doubly your own, by adding gratitude to tenderness."

I had sunk before her, and caught, in spite of herself, the beams of her sweet eyes. Sometimes she half raised them, with a partial regard which she could not suppress; at others, fixed them on the ground, as too much disposed to favour me to be trusted, and too modest to meet her own merited praise.

"Extorted as I well know this sincerity must be, my Lord," said she, after a short pause, and with an air of more calmness and dignity, "I must acknow-

ledge myself honoured in your confidence. I accept the regard you offer me on the terms you propose; nor am I ashamed to say, that the future shall depend on your own determinations. You cannot need advice to cure your little foibles; since to know, is, in a mind like yours, to correct them. I will confess (is it not indeed already too apparent?) that I have ever regarded them with too partial an eye, to prove a severe monitor."

The company now appeared on the lawn; and, kissing her hand, I suffered her to escape them.

Thus am I, whether I will or no, the beloved, the acknowledged choice of the most charming, the most admired woman in England. Tell me, then, I pr'ythee Frank, why I have still "this craving void left aching in my breast?"—why that is merely a mirror, which only reflects the present object; yet at intervals is so warm with admiration, so enraptured with implied tenderness, that I never know I am not in love with Lady Diana,

but when she is absent? Her heart, disburdened of its feelings and its doubts, now first felt the fond pleasure of a full confidence—the delight of an unlimited hope: and what a relief did this give to her features! Again they glowed with that innocent cheerfulness, that serene modesty, which ever augments her beauty, perfect as it is. She yet strove to disguise an alteration of which she was sufficiently sensible, and robbed her lips of half the smiles which her eyes did us the justice to convey.

Lord Winchester was so overjoyed when he saw this marriage at last in the train he wished, as to produce his best burgundy, in which he made me pledge him, till he over-did my poor head. As to his own, that did not hold out so long; and then forth came the little all which he had treasured there. What he should do for this son, and what for the next: (o' my conscience, he concludes that I shall have as numerous a race as Priam!). Never can he retain, for a sin-

gle day, a secret so interesting to himself; and the world will not think that I show too much respect to decorum—though an heiress like his daughter, will render little errors very pardonable.

I mean to remain here till June; then, as the Winchester family must attend the birth-day, I shall change my mourning, and ramble a little, to try the strength of my passion by the old touchstone—absence.

It has always been my intention, if I married again, to secure my daughters from all exigencies, by settling on them fortunes suitable to their rank; and this now becomes the more necessary, as the Winchester family might hereafter proportion their claims rather to their mother's birth, than mine. Having, however (with her help), hitherto lived up to my income, it was not in logic to save something from nothing. I have a right, while without a son, to sell my Yorkshire estate; which is all of my inheritance not entailed. The mansion is little more than

a ruin; and the whole too far from the capital, to delight those who love driving backward and forward very often. I am told that it is fine land, and abounds in well-grown timber: the sale of this will, therefore, ascertain noble fortunes for my two daughters, and yet leave me some money to squander on the usual matrimonial fly-flaps. Neither am I without a very extraordinary design, in which, whether you will or no, you are to become a party. You must condescend to hold, in trust, an annuity for her whom I once loved, if only because I did once love her. It would humble me too much, to suppose that a licentious life might ever become necessary to Cecilia Rivers. The caprice of an old man is but a poor dependence; and she was not so situated as, perhaps, to ensure a jointure. This may one day expose the unhappy girl to the ignominious situation from which he rescued her; if, indeed, such a marriage can be called a rescue. I shall be very explicit on this subject with Lady Diana,

before she has any voice in the disposition of my fortune. Should she want this kind of benevolence, it would cost her dear in my esteem.

Tell Mrs. Trevilian, that I expect her to exercise her talents in an epithalamium, and send me a volume of civil things in the interim; since my conduct must be as exactly what she wished, as if she had directed it. I have the presumption, by anticipation, to invite her to the wedding; and, as you are too faithful a pair to be divided, I think I shall allow you to come along with her. I am charged with abundance of civil things from my bride-elect to both.

Yours ever,

WESTBURY.

LETTER XCIX.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

THE heat, and my heart-seated chagrin, have so visibly affected my looks, as well as constitution, that Colonel Percival has meditated removing for the summer, ever since he got out of his arm-chair. His own little mansion is in Yorkshire; happily too far for our present excursion; and I have been advised to try the Bristol waters. They are, as I am told, admirably calculated to restore invalids in the early attack of a pulmonary complaint, but seldom preserve life when once it is positively endangered.

To Clifton, therefore, are we come; and from the fulness of the season are crammed into very uncomfortable lodgings, till the Colonel can fix upon a house which will content all our various tempers; and that is by no means easy, for Mrs.

Egerton will not go out of the reach of her chapel, Miss Egerton could live in the little circle of pleasure, and the Colonel himself cannot exist without a friend and a backgammon-table. However, while he has his niece he may make sure of Sir George's company. As to me, my choice was made at once: I was completely fascinated in riding round the down, that reaches on one side to the lofty rocks of St. Vincent; almost on the edge of which stands the house I would fix on. You never, I think, visited this spot; therefore can have no idea of the beauty of the scenery. Imagine a bold river (at least when the tide is full) meandering between two ridges of high and irregular rocks, of very different appearance. Those which Durdham Down overhangs, are rude and stony; while every enormous crag, varying into reddening shades, presents the eye with all the richness that barren beauty will allow. The opposite side slopes backward in almost similar indentures; and

its shelvings having caught the earth which crumbled from the top, trees and bushes have taken root in the thin soil, which almost cover the rocks, and shelter innumerable nightingales, who safely sing there, and, when the moon shines, must make the solemn landscape inconceivably touching. Upon the skirt of the down, on the rocky side, stands a solitary house, of singular structure, erected upon an indenture, which only leaves room for a little garden. At the foot of the rock on which the building rises, the river takes a bold sweep, leaving a meadow covered with cattle; while the more distant view shows you the Severn, spreading like an arm of the sea, over which ships are scattered. Beyond the water rise the hills of Wales; sometimes appearing like rude clouds, while at others, the sun shining on them though obscured to us, the eye has power to trace both their verdure and intersections. The down, in front, seems almost to be covered with groups of people, carriages, horses, and such cheer-

ful objects as amuse those who think life and motion necessary to complete every prospect. Those who live here say, that, were I to remain twenty years, I shall never see this glorious scene to so much advantage as yesterday evening. The clearness of the air rendered every cloud a fleece of silver. The spring tide having ebbed a little while, some ships of burden had just reached the sweep of the river which I have described as almost immediately under us. The mariners were busy unfurling their sails; the passengers drinking a farewel to their friends; the birds singing in the clefts: and the setting sun, half lost in the distant waves, gave us a parting look, through the dark vista of a rich purple cloud, burnishing the water, and playing upon the shipping. All nature seemed glad in this season of gladness; and chilled, dead to all other delights, my heart yet was softened at viewing the glories of summer... In this house could I live and die. There, like a solitary bird, would I look down,

as from a nest, upon the distant, happy world, with which I would not wish a nearer intercourse. I am weary enough of every one around me, and much, much more weary of myself.

Not an hour of solitude can I even now get. Miss Egerton has set her mind on going to the ball, and, having no acquaintance here, presses me to accompany her. Indeed she has found an effectual way to prevent my refusal, by declaring that she will take both her mother and Sir George Harington, and thus leave me alone with her uncle. Angry as I was at this indirect threat, I felt half ashamed to have reduced her to indelicacy, by hesitating when it was in my power, by an effort over myself, to oblige her; but could she guess what a toil I find it to dress, and what a pain I suffer in encountering a thousand unknown busy eyes, all of whom seem to dive into my sickly, oppressed heart, even she would pity me.

Glad should I be were they all gone, and I alone in the hanging garden, watch-

ing the departing sun, and listening to the nightingales. I find myself far, far from well; and the pain in my side makes it misery to walk a hundred yards. However, I can sit still in the rooms, and I owe too much to my sweet Sophia to assist in mortifying her.

* * * * * *

Amelia, I think I will, ever after this, trust my own melancholy presages. I would not break my word with myself, by mentioning the name of Lord Westbury, or, too surely, I was struck with an apprehension that I should meet him. Nor was I mistaken. I perceived him at once dancing with Lady Diana Selwyn. Our eyes instantaneously encountered. I grew too ill to conceal what I suffered, and, hastening out of the ball-room, was scarce beyond its door ere I dropped down. I had been so much indisposed all day, that no one sought any immediate cause for the fainting, and the whole party brought me home directly.

It was impossible but he must know

the effect of his presence. My languid eye opened but to seek for him. I thought, as recollection returned, that his compassion, his very presence, would have a little softened my sufferings; but he was no longer to be seen! Even humanity did not induce him for one moment to quit his beautiful bride!—for such, alas! no doubt, Lady Diana will very soon be, as he has already changed his mourning. Your letter, like a caustic, burns at my heart. I did, indeed, feel humbled too much at my own apparent bridal state, to enjoy the retort which I once meditated.

It is, perhaps, best that he should not have noticed me; for I have discovered Colonel Percival to be very curious now to learn the name that he once would not know. He, I could see, much suspected Mr. Clifford to have been the lamented lover. That was easily confuted.

How irresistible can Lord Westbury ever be, when anxious to please! Absent, and present, he appears to me two diffe-

rent persons. Alas! he was last night the very being whom I adored! Oh! why dare I not proclaim him a living lie!

We are removing to the favourite Rock House, out of which I shall not stir, I assure you.

LETTER C.

TO FRANCIS TREVILIAN, ESQ.

WE are all amazingly gracious here, at Bromley Grove. Lady Winchester desires to have her little cousins, meaning my daughters, to visit her; and is sure that Diana will be charmed with them. I have been intrusted with the care of my bride elect, during a very pleasant excursion, which we finished at Bristol Hotwells. Governor Fortescue proposed it to Lady Diana, who flattered and pleased me greatly, by remaining undecided till she discovered which way I inclined. In ac-

knowledgement for this sweet condescension, I immediately cast my sables. Knowing that she loved dancing, I sent Alton forward, to procure us proper apartments, together with tickets for the evening ball: and when I led Lady Diana into the room, I found myself in happier spirits than I have known this twelvemonth. Her rank made it proper for her to dance; and rather than turn her over to the master of the ceremonies, I stood up with her myself. We were on the point of finishing, when a buzz among the company caused me to raise my eyes, when, lo!

"In glided Margaret's grimly ghost,
And stood at William's feet!"

* * * * *

"Her face was like an April morn,
Clad in a wintry cloud."

In plain English, I beheld Miss Rivers, or Mrs. —— I forget her detestable new name; her complexion white as her gown, and her expressive eyes riveted on mine. Finding that I saw her, she turned, and

eagerly quitted the room. I felt ready to implore her aloud to stop a single moment. Forgetful of every thing but herself, had I not, unawares, found Lady Diana's hand in mine, as if I had meant to conduct her to her seat, I should certainly have left her to find it alone: as it was, I obliged her to use so much expedition by the example I set, that she rather ran than walked; when, away flew I to the door at which my wan ghost had vanished. It led to an ante-room, where a group of people were collected around an individual. I added to the number; and saw my Cecilia—for it was, indeed, that charmer—wholly lifeless. A livid paleness covered her whole faded countenance; and her hands, which a young lady and the woman in waiting had stripped of her gloves, dropped upon her gown, not less white or cold. Oh! could I now remember that she had a fault, a folly, a vice? No; I remembered only that she had a heart! a heart which had been my own—nay, even at that moment, perhaps, was not

wholly lost to me: for it became evident that she never could *hate* the man whose very sight deprived her of animation. Every moment was I ready to snatch her to a bosom whose warmth might have re-animated hers, though chilled by the hand of death; when an old silver-headed officer elbowed onward, followed by a waiter with drops and water. "Thy Cecilia!—Ah, villain! call her again so, if thou durst!" I was near crying out. Could I not have murdered him, think you, when I saw him throw his arm under her neck, to raise it, as it seemed in danger of being strained by hanging over the chair? I ventured to touch the hand which hung by me; it was cold enough almost to make me start. Every medicine seemed to me likely to prove ineffectual; when recollecting that Lady Diana had been smelling to some volatile spirit, of the virtue of which I had heard her boast, I flew into the room to ask her for the phial. What an eternal age was she seeking it! (had she known for whom the loan was requested, I should

have thought her delay merely spite) while I stood ready to stamp with impatience. At last she put it into my hand, and I flew back to my love; but, alas! she, and all her company, were vanished again. I almost wanted Lady Diana's smelling bottle myself, I was so cursedly vexed.

I am ashamed to tell thee, Frank, that even now I have not recovered this abrupt attack upon my feelings. Yet wherefore should I be ashamed? Did not nature, powerful nature, speak in Cecilia's favour? Was she even sensible of the cruel twinges which she gave my heart? Nothing in the universe could have interested me like this total loss of vital power, for art might occasion every thing else. Am I, indeed, still dear to my Cecilia! Is it grief for thy errors, and reviving tenderness for thy Westbury, that thus have stolen the roses of youth from thy cheeks, my love, and the fulness of health from thy frame! Ah, have I been a blight upon all thy graces!—She is ill, indeed;

ill beyond all deception. I surveyed her whole person, and saw it to be shrunk in a manner almost incredible. Shakspeare's image of concealed love, too hackneyed to need repetition, suits well with her present appearance.

I sank upon the chair which Cecilia had quitted, and ran through a long train of painful reflexions. One moment I resolved to see, to reproach—alas! I fear to forgive her: and, quitting the angelic Diana, who had rested all her future peace on my honour, I had almost determined voluntarily to relapse into my fond, my enthusiastic folly. Yet has she not for ever sullied, degraded herself? cried my better genius; for the meanest of all considerations, given that fair, that fragile form, to one whose years must for ever impeach the purity of her principles, had her affections been free? Can I stoop to take to my bosom the woman who has placed herself in such an odious predicament? Her tears, her fits, are only merited punishments for such a failure;

and since she has brought contempt upon herself, I ought to see her endure it with a manly courage! How long I had argued this knotty point with my fluctuating heart, I know not; but I suddenly found my elbow jogged by young Fortescue. "Are you ill, my Lord," cried he, "or asleep? I suppose you recollect that you engaged Lady Diana Selwyn's hand? She is sitting by herself, while all the dancing ladies have joined the set. What a hunt have I had for you, while my own partner has been raving!" Away ran he; and, shocked at my absence of mind and ill breeding, I hastened after him. Lady Diana was more than appeased—in truth alarmed—when I pleaded indisposition, and I plainly perceived longed for the moment when she could without impropriety retire. I was still, at intervals, very, very absent, and fear that sweet girl will long remember the unintelligible events of the evening.

Amid all the gay follies of my life, I could never charge myself with the seduc-

tion of an innocent woman, much less a wife. To those who regard matrimony only as a civil institution, the tie ought to be inviolable; and by the golden rule have I hitherto been governed. In my progress through the world I turned my eyes only to those of the sex who gave the reins to inclination, and whose situation secured me from mercenary attacks. The woman who once showed a design upon my fortune, lost me for ever; and that merely because I disdained to become a kind of property. Shall I, then, now deliberately submit to such humiliation? No: her old husband has bought, and let him keep her! She ought long to lament having placed between herself and me a barrier so disgraceful. Diana, my spotless, fair Diana, resume thy proper empire!—that heart which, wild and ungrateful, had almost renounced thy sway;—breathe into it thy own soft benignity! Smile all to rest, and preserve it by thy perpetual presence from ever wandering! How often did I wish the sweet

girl, that night, in my arms, as if by being there she would have been the more in my heart! Yet what, on comparison, was Lady Diana inferior to her rival, when Cecilia was white as Virtue herself? Now, alas! she certainly was so much her superior, that it became a crime against decorum to name them in a breath.

After a thousand of these rêveries, I formed a prudent resolution to quit the place. Thus only could I wholly avoid that fair and fading rival, whose unabated influence would, perhaps, ever counteract my best reason.

I pretended, in the morning, to have received a letter from you on urgent business, but promised to return time enough to drive Lady Diana home. She could not fail to observe that something had agitated me; yet she restrained the vice of her sex—curiosity; and with the most perfect reliance parted from and received me again. Would that the dear, confiding charmer were once my wife, and my fate determined! I adhere to her as

to a guardian angel; yet, even while gazing on her lovely face, and listening to her mild voice, whose every accent breathes love and sweetness, cruel, treacherous ideas insinuate themselves into my heart, which perversely sees, hears, loves only Cecilia. Teach me, if possible, to cure this depravity of the soul! But you, perhaps, have never felt it: you have known how to be content with a common happiness. So never yet could your friend; and this, alone, justifies his eccentricity.

LETTER CI.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Rock House.

ALL is, indeed, now over with me! Oh, my dear, prophetic friend! I can feel nothing more! The present evil will determine my destiny, and that alone can give me a moment's comfort.

Ever since I received your fatal letter, I fancied that I could trace an alteration in the Colonel's behaviour. At intervals I flattered myself that this was only the creation of a heart too delicate and apprehensive; but, alas! I am woefully undeceived.

We came to this beautiful retirement, on Durdham Down, on Monday last; and I was charmed to call the sweet romantic spot my home. I wandered about the garden and rocks till it became necessary to dress for dinner, and on entering my chamber saw Colonel Percival's nightgown hanging on a chair. I carelessly bade the maid take it to the best apartment. "My master ordered his man to leave it in yours, Madam," said the girl. I thought, at these words, I should have sunk into the earth. Such a chill crept over me as death itself can hardly give. I at length gained breath enough to speak; and still hoping that I might be deceived, inquired who slept in the best chamber. "Sir George Harington," was

the answer.—" Who in the Blue?"—" Madam and Miss." Three best bedrooms were all which this little mansion afforded; nor had I, till this wretched moment, understood that Sir George was to make it his home.

Surely, after surviving a shock like this, I may dread being immortal. Yet how was I to speak, upon a subject so odious, to a man who must be resolved on my misery, and by my own folly had been made the master of my future fate! "Oh, what comparative innocence," cried I, "had it been in me to have yielded to Lord Westbury! Equal years, boundless tenderness, impassioned importunity, would, in that instance, have lessened the guilt, and the contempt of the world have, perhaps, sufficiently punished the failure!" Here I had thrown myself deliberately into a net from which I saw no possible means of escaping; and, while sinking under the horrors of my fate, should be supposed to owe gratitude, to receive distinction! Too plainly I felt my delicacy to be irre

trievably wounded; and thought, that, could I summon resolution to speak to the detested man, it might, perhaps, deter him from persisting. For this, I soon found that I now wanted spirit: indeed I never had that requisite on such an occasion. Twenty times did I totter down to the parlour-door, and as often creep up again, to weep, lament, arraign his conduct, and far more my own; after which I once more made the fruitless effort. I think I should never have turned the lock of that dreaded door myself, but, a man-servant who was passing, saw me coming down, and hastily threw it wide open. I cast my eyes on the hideous man, who, with his spectacles on, sat coolly reading a huge folio. Heavens, how I shuddered! Sinking on the farthest window-seat, with a heart almost convulsed, after many vain efforts at length I said, in the faintest voice—

"I fancy, Sir, that your servant has made a mistake. I will thank you to order him to place your things in your own apartment."

" Oh, no, my dear!" returned he, in a tone which he, probably, thought kind; but the dreadful intelligence which it conveyed makes it still ring in my ears like the knell of death; " he only obeyed my orders. Surely you cannot think of preserving your nicety always: and now we are even stinted for room."

My fears thus verified, I fell into an agony of tears. " I cannot but hope yet, Sir," returned I as soon as I could speak, " that you mean more to regard your own honour than to exact such a miserable compliance. I never, for a moment, deceived you. I told you that my breaking heart was given to another, long, long since. Though torn for ever from the hope which could alone make my happiness, that heart is still devoted to its only beloved. It ever will be so. Well you know that I simply promised to respect you as my benefactor, my friend, my father! I have not swerved from my engagement—Oh, then, be just to yours!"

" Why, 'faith, my dear girl," said he,

" when I made that engagement I very honourably meant to keep it; but you know that few men ever keep any; and had a mighty poor opinion of yourself or me. Come, come," added he, rising, and approaching me (upon which I wished myself out of the window); " hold your tongue, dry your eyes, and do not expose either me or yourself. You are married to me, and have no remedy. In addition to your jointure, I have added a codicil to my will, so much in your favour that you cannot be ungrateful. Do you wish for a new carriage? Name any thing in which I can oblige you."

In concluding this speech, he threw his hateful arms around me, from which I broke with a strength that seemed to me supernatural. " Far, far from me, Sir," cried I, " be all such dear-bought indulgences! I see, too plainly, that you are determined in your purpose; but you shall find me as determined. The world could not buy my consent."

" And, pray, how will you help your-

self? When you come to consider, you will think better of the matter, child," said he chucking me under the chin, with a leer as odious as the action. "Talk to my sister: she is a mighty pious woman, has been married herself, and will tell you what the Gospel says is your duty."

"On that, Sir, my own conscience must decide; and what you call a duty, that terms a crime. Rather do you consider. Can you complete the evils from which this ostensible generosity was to save me? You see a poor declining creature, with an alienated, unwilling heart—a heart, alas! already broken. Oh, give me the little time which God allows me, that I may repent of my errors, and depart in peace! Coldness and tears, indifference would produce. I feel horror, disgust, aversion!"

"You should have thought of all this before. How, pray, do you justify this aversion, or the insolent avowal of it?"

"God, Sir, has not given me power to define that irresistible impulse which

chastens passion in the human heart, by confining it to a single object."

"Ay, these are mighty fine romantic *miss-like* notions! Get rid of them as fast as you can, and grow a little more like the rest of the world. But you know I always told you that I was a cursed obstinate old fellow; and, since I have no hopes of gaining your love, why your obedience I will have; so no more words about it."

"Never!" replied I with an air and accent that daunted even him. "My will is strong, though my frame is weak. You have sought, by a villainous pretence of generosity, to ensnare to her ruin a wretch who was unversed in the ways of the world; but at the judgement-seat of God I cite you to answer for the despair to which you impel her! Before that awful God, who knows which of us has broken the compact, I solemnly swear that the last violence only shall subdue me, and, even then, His power alone can prevent my lifting my hand against my life!"

"Lifting your hand against your life!" cried he with a cool, sarcastic, insolent air; "you girls are all apt to talk of it, but I never found one dangling in her own garters yet. You are not the first fond Miss whom I have seen in airs like these, who has lived to laugh with me at her own folly. Get off your knees. Why, I shall have the servants think I have been beating you. Have done with these romantic fancies, or I must think of some way to cure you."

I could find no words for the contempt and disgust he excited. Rushing into the garden, I found myself upon the brow of the rock. Pardon me, Heaven, if a fearful thought occurred! But, looking round, I saw the horrible old savage had, with his usual apathy, taken himself again to his book, and left me time to consider my conduct. Well I knew that the God who punished might pardon; and that I should add to my sins by distrusting His mercy. I saw that the wretch depended on bringing me to terms, and

would not, immediately, drive me to extremity. When I had a little recovered the shock, I therefore returned to the house, and, with the maid's assistance, removed all my things into a light closet adjoining to Mrs. Egerton's chamber. An easy chair happened to stand there, in which I shall perhaps pass the remainder of my short, erroneous, miserable life; unless I can recal him to reason. On my refusing to dine below, Mrs. Egerton sent me, by my maid, some dinner, and came up, afterwards, herself. Two tedious hours she wasted upon me. The dissatisfaction which she felt at the marriage, makes her rather glad than sorry to see how we go on, though she affects perfect candour. It would be needless to recapitulate her dull arguments. No eloquence could have changed my resolution; but, alas! poor woman! that talent is not hers. I gathered, however, that her daughter's ready acceptance of Sir George Harington, who is very little younger than Colonel Percival, had brought on my persecution.

This visit was followed by one from Sophia, although her uncle had strictly forbidden her interference. She cannot be restrained from any generous act by narrow motives. She utterly condemned my proceeding, and reproached me with not waiting for her advice: insisted that I should only have laughed at the old gentleman, and not roused the obstinacy of his temper, by showing that of mine; after which he, she well knew, would be conqueror. Then she wondered why I should so afflict myself. In short, I never saw her so deficient in delicacy or sensibility, and was as weary of her as I before had been of her mother.

Do I indeed, then, differ from the generality of my sex? Yet surely, however refined and romantic my sentiments are, my impulses cannot be singular.

Thanks to my maid, who truly loves me, I have the means of writing to you; for the Colonel says, that, since I have shut myself up in garrison, I shall undergo a blockade, and want whatever

conveniences I have not previously secured.

Miss Egerton insinuated something of his threatening—that is, unless the gout befriends me, and lays him up—to carry me to his house in Yorkshire; but I am resolved he never shall. He says my brain is turned. Indeed, my dear, such various griefs divide my ideas, that they seem sometimes almost to unsettle them. He will make me a lunatic, or at least treat me like one.

Mrs. Egerton has paid me a second visit, and lectured me as if I were an untractable child. Her brother, I find, depends upon my gentle temper; but he knows it not. Superior to trifles, it is never roused but by things of consequence, and then not easily is it subdued.

Oh, your letter, your letter! Sad prophecy of my untoward fate! Just Heaven! can there exist a wretch who finds, in the bitter tears of misery, a heightened

satisfaction! That idea would, alone, make this man loathsome to me.

They tell me that I am the news of the Wells. No matter. Might I become a warning to other young women, I should not hesitate to publish my error to the whole world. You, my Amelia, will grant me that compassion denied by the misjudging. You will not hear your unhappy Cecilia vilified. Direct, under cover, to my maid, Mrs. Mary Mitchell. I shall then be certain of one moment of pleasure in the sight of your hand. Hardly can I discern the letters I am scrawling, or tell you that I am, while any thing, your Cecilia. Ah! why did I quit the addition of Rivers! But am I not greatly punished for my folly and my pride?

LETTER CII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Rock House.

OH, Friendship! thou only balm to a wounded soul, how often has thy sweetness allayed the burning anguish of mine! Your tears, your compassion, your generous ardour, my only comforter, seem to strengthen and sooth me. Adversity, that bond of affection to minds of sensibility, has doubled ours. I feel all the delicacy of the character which only judges and condemns in the days of prosperity, but never, never adds one pang to those of misfortune!

The idea that occurred to you had already taken up all my thoughts; but flight should be ever a last resource. And whither can I fly? A stranger almost everywhere, unconnected and unknown, I dread lest I should only ex-

change one evil for another. To you I dare not come. Oh, let me not, in return for your boundless kindness, involve you in censure or inconvenience! Did I not abhor France, with Miss Fermor, indeed—but her convent is expensive, and much visited; nor would it be possible to remain in it unknown.

Mary assures me that she overheard Mrs. Egerton and her brother settling his Yorkshire journey. The old lady means to go previously, she tells me, with her daughter and Sir George, to Piersfield, lest Sophia should offend her uncle by interfering. That generous friend has not been allowed to visit me these two days. Sometimes I look from my window at the hills of Wales, and think, that, in a lonely spot there, I might remain undiscovered. I have about thirty guineas, which will convey me as far as I am, alas! able to go. I have, at this moment, a plan afloat in my head, that I think might succeed. A path leads down, through these rocks, to the Old Well-

house, where a boat might remain waiting till the family had retired to rest: and Mary might, surely, escape with me; for my broken health will not allow me to venture alone. She is a native of Pembroke, and, were she here, I might immediately arrange the matter with her.

Colonel Percival thought proper, yesterday, to hobble up to the only retreat which his inhumanity has left me; but I refused him leave to come in: nor would I enter into any discourse, unless he would confirm his promise, made prior to the marriage. He departed in a rage, and I have heard no more of him since.

How unlucky! Mary assures me that this Severn sea, which looks so beautiful, is rough, and often very dangerous; nor can it be crossed unless at one of the passage-houses. That path, too, which I mentioned, is impassable in the dark. I have interested her in my cause, and conjured her to consider how we may get, undiscovered, into her country.

* * * * * *

After another day of cruel suspense, I have, at length, a hope of escaping. Mary saw on the down, this morning, a postillion whom she knew in Bath. He had just been dismissed from a job, and was going home with the empty chaise. She had sense enough to offer him the bribe of a guinea, besides paying for the chaise, if he would wait till night, and carry her and another young woman to the New Passage, as they here call the ferry to Wales. The lad promised secresy, and to be near this house at eleven at night. From the passage he must necessarily hasten home, or lose his place; and as Bath is the last town where I shall be sought, and this family all fancy that I have a dread of water, I think I shall be safe; at least till I get out of the public track.

I have nothing to pack up but my letters, with a little linen, and one gown, that they may not guess at my being disguised in Mary's, which I intend to wear, and call myself her fellow-servant.

The moment I reach a place of safety you shall hear from me.

The appearance of this action is lost in the necessity. Alas! had I not sacrificed too much already to appearance, I had never known this bitter distress!

Adieu, my dearest Amelia! Your prayers are ever for me; and I accept, with frankness, your pecuniary offers. Yes, I will consent to be indebted to you for the means of supporting my short existence; and love you so well as hardly to lament that it is your happy fortune to be the obliger.

I must send this off directly, or the Colonel may, after I am gone, perhaps get it back from the post-office.

A heavy sky threatens thunder storms; but I must not think of little dangers.

LETTER CIII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Rock House.

WHO shall, henceforth, arraign the providence of God, or venture to despair? Oh, let me ever revere, ever worship, the awful hand which has rescued me even in my extremity!

After concluding my last, I endeavoured to collect and prepare myself for a flight, to which, alas! my weakened health rendered me very unequal. Mrs. Egerton had just made me another of her tedious visits, and, seeing me very ill, the human death-watch ticked so many vapourish ideas into my head, that I almost fancied I might run the risk of dying where I was. But terror is a sentiment, or rather feeling, to which all others must give way; and to be out of the reach of this formidable Colonel, though I expired

in the postchaise, seemed to me a material point. The intervening hours were passed in calling to account that weak, proud, impassioned heart, which rather dared abuse a sacred ceremony, and trifle with God himself, than encounter the little evil of blushing in the presence of a being of his creating. I bent before Him, and acknowledged the justice of my punishment.

The closing evening produced terrible storms: the rain threatened another deluge, and the thunder and lightning might have awed an atheist. Happily my education saved me from any weak fear of the elements; but I lingered beyond my time to sooth the companion of my flight, who seemed ready every moment to sink into fits with terror. At length the hurricane abated, and, by Mary's advice, I began wrapping myself up in a variety of cloaks, and other coverings, which might a little save me, should the rain come on as heavily again. She had, by my desire, stolen down to see if the postboy was in

readiness, and I remained at the head of the stairs, expecting her return, in misery enough, Heaven knows. I was dozing, I really believe, for I found myself so exhausted with continually sitting up, that I could have slept upon a wisp of straw, when Sir George Harington threw open the parlour door, and called, in an agitated voice, for Colonel Percival's man. I had heard them at backgammon, which they had just left playing. A moment afterwards the footman obliged me to retreat, by flying up to Mrs. Egerton (who was in bed with her daughter), entreating her to hasten down, as the Colonel was either dead or dying, and he must run to the Wells for a surgeon. Humanity at once drove from my mind all recollection of my own immediate intent: I rushed out, and told the servant that a chaise was almost at the door, which would carry him instantly to the Wells; and then flew into the parlour to offer my assistance. I found Sir George, with the servants, who had laid the wretched man

on the sofa, unbuttoning his collar and wristbands; and I soon understood that his death-stroke was an apoplexy, as he had dropped with a glass of wine in his hand. No pulse beat, no motion remained in his heart, though his eyes were wide open, fixed, and glaring in a terrible manner. Mrs. Egerton would have him put to bed, and by its side began her devotions with great composure, though her brother gave no sign of existence. At length the man returned in my chaise with the surgeon, who, in a moment, pronounced life utterly gone from Colonel Percival; though he made three punctures, to oblige Mrs. Egerton, but drew not one drop of blood. Already had the stiffness of death seized on the limbs, and all the livid look of a corse robbed him of that healthy appearance which made his age not displeasing.

The day had now broke, and I quitted this scene to retire to the parlour, where it was soon found that the assistance of the surgeon might avail me, though not the

patient whom he had been called to attend. That gentleman at once perceived my languid, exhausted state, and ordered me to be put to bed.

I could not see myself undressed without recollecting what a singular impression I must have made on the surgeon, when he first met me, for I was equipped exactly like my maid, and wrapped in ten cloaks, I really believe. It will, however, add to the entertainment which I have already given the company at the Wells, with whom I have been the favourite topic.

Weary as I must necessarily have been, my mind was too much agitated, and my frame too much exhausted, to allow me to sleep: my eyelids were weighed down, but I was not able to close them. A dead body, even of a young person, is, I doubt not, a frightful object; but the corse of one advanced in years is terrible: a wrinkled lividness succeeds to the colour which age breaks upon the face, and leaves it earthy indeed!—Poor man!

may his faults be forgiven him, for the sake of his virtues; as some he certainly had!

His heir is his brother's son, and an officer in service. An express is sent to summon him hither.

LETTER CIV.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Rock House.

CAPTAIN PERCIVAL's journey has been so long of necessity delayed, that he has written to Sir George Harington, whom he knew to be joint-executor with himself, to open the will, and comply with it exactly. This being done, in presence of the Egertons and Fraziers, to the general disappointment it was found, by that codicil which the Colonel in his foolish fit mentioned to me, that I had a legacy of ten thousand pounds, besides

the original settlement of four hundred a-year. Alas! my dear, why would not this strange man wholly deserve or wholly dispense with my esteem! I am obliged to acknowledge my obligation, even while I recollect him with abhorrence. Why, why was I cast off without cause by the man whom I adored, and persecuted almost to the grave with the weak attachment of him whom I detested! To Miss Egerton he bequeaths twenty thousand pounds, and only one thousand to her mother; with a few trifling legacies to the Fraziers and other relations, and some small annuities to his servants. Captain Percival has no more than, as heir at law, he would have; and that is lessened by the drawback of my jointure. If he should resemble his aunt, I shall have a new kind of vexation to encounter, perhaps, in a lawsuit; for all the family know the cause of the Colonel's treatment of me: consequently, that the marriage is incomplete. As to Mrs. Egerton, neither piety nor prudence can keep her within bounds: she

has just discovered that I am an artful, insidious creature, who took advantage of some foolish fit to persuade her poor brother to destroy his precious soul in defrauding his relations. Happily my conduct is a clearer vindication than any thing that I could urge. Should I have exasperated, set him at defiance, if I had been the sycophant she represents me? Alas! could riches have compensated for the loss of my own esteem, I might have owed them to a hand so dear, as makes it a virtue indeed not to regret the refusal. But why should I be provoked at an injustice inseparable from a mind like Mrs. Egerton's! Born to tread through life a bounded circle, she concludes every wider one to be too extensive. I am told she further says, that she well knows the trick of the pretended marriage, and can easily, by law, take from me the name and the fortune I owe to it. In that case, I fancy, she must get the will set aside: and as Colonel Percival left three nieces and one nephew, she would find, by dividing his

fortune among so many, that her daughter's share would rather be lessened than increased.

How narrow minds for ever defeat their own purposes! Did this poor woman know how little I value what she values so highly; how easily, by a kind word, a little well-acted complacency, she might have obtained this envied legacy; she would never forgive her own imprudence. Hurt, however, as I felt myself, I positively declared that to her I would never give it up. Happily I did not, in my wrath, include her daughter in this declaration; and by making it over hereafter to Miss Egerton, I shall oblige her mother most forcibly to feel her own littleness. The amiable Sophia thinks and acts very differently: she perpetually entreats me to overlook her mother's rudeness, and laments the foolish fondness for herself which occasions it. I could wish this envied legacy trebled, that I may treble the pleasure with which I shall make it over to her.

The Colonel is, it seems, to be buried in the family vault in Yorkshire. We are surrounded here by mutes, plumes, and the insignia of death. His sister weeps and prays all day long; yet, you see, can contest his legacies ere yet he is laid in the earth. It is true that this codicil was added before I disobliged him, and he might intend to alter it; though that is very uncertain, as, from the peculiar perverseness of his temper, my resistance rather, it seems, endeared me to him. However, the chance is in my favour. Alas! all that ever have been so, were, like this, wholly unimportant to my happiness!

Sir George Harington seems to proportion the pomp of the funeral rather to his own fortune than that of Colonel Percival. I shall be sorry if this falls on the heir at law; since it is he alone who will have reason to be dissatisfied with me for marrying his uncle.

Nothing I can say or do escapes some

ill-natured comment from Mrs. Egerton. The resignation and composure of my conduct now offend her. She affects the pomp and show of sorrow, and taxes me with a want of decency, and necessary feeling, only because I throw open my windows when the day closes, and listen to the nightingales. What a wretched hypocrite would the world think me, if I acted the lamented, disconsolate widow! And yet I could number tear for tear, and groan for groan, might I choose my subject. Alas! my dear,

"The body finds
Respite from torment; but the mind has none:
For thousand restless thoughts of different kinds
Beat thick upon the soul. Some are comparing
The present with the past: how happy once I was,
And now how wretched! Some presenting me
My miseries by others' happiness:
While others, falsely flatt'ring me to life,
Tell me my fortune ripens in the womb
Of Time, and I shall yet be happy."

Oh vain, vain thought! Alas! if it were possible that I could restore Lord West-

bury to my own esteem, or be restored to his—if his heart were, at length, to render me that justice which mine bursts at his denying it—what would it now avail! The world witnesses his engagement to Lady Diana Selwyn. In the lovely, the deserving, the affectionate daughter of Lord Winchester, he seeks his future happiness. Ever, ever may he find it! That woman whom he sacrificed to the beautiful heiress, sees her charms and her merit with wonder and delight. Yet in mere beauty it is not possible for her to exceed the wife whom he lost, and with Lady Westbury he was not happy. How self-love will bias our natures! The mind of Lady Diana is, no doubt, matched to her person. Alas! if so, is she not too amiable for him whom she is ready to entrust her fate with? But let her have all the loveliness scattered through her whole sex! let the man of her choice adore her, and, sacrificing to their mutual generous attachment all meaner pleasures and pursuits, let him become a glory to this

world, as well as to that hereafter! There the sad, the deep sense of human injury will be cancelled! No weak repinings, no selfish sorrow, will there sully the purity of the enlarged soul! There, perhaps, Lord Westbury will be equally mine! Oh, soft glow, blessed emanation, dear mixture of sadness and joy! How long is it since my heart has been penetrated with an emotion so tender!

If Mrs. Egerton could see this letter, how would she condemn me! But, alas! mine was a wedded heart before I passed the church-door with her brother; and, till I am carried to my grave, the ligament cannot be broken.

LETTER CV.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Rock House.

AM I, indeed, too fortunate in so early escaping the bondage which I imposed upon myself? Alas, my dear! could you see the ravages which grief, apprehension, and fatigue, have made in my health, and visibly traced on my countenance, I do not think you would term me *too fortunate.*

I have been in continual expectation of Captain Percival; and Sophia, with whom he is no favourite, had persuaded me that it was impossible we should like one another. Mrs. Egerton, I found, was determined not to be wanting in impressing him with her own prejudice respecting me; for she anxiously waited his coming, and ordered him to be first ushered into her apartment; where she

kept him an age before he was suffered to leave her. He then requested leave to pay his respects, as he termed the visit, to me; and appeared not a little surprised at the complacency of my manners, together with my drooping youth. He no longer thought of conducting himself with coldness; and I found every idea to his disadvantage vanish before his very look. Captain Percival has one of those ingenuous countenances which would impress the most obstinate sceptic in physiognomy with the excellence of his heart. Brought up from childhood in the army, there is something frank and military in his manners; and though his figure is small, he never wants dignity. Lively in his pursuits, generous in his temper, young Percival's character will, I am persuaded, rise with every occasion which calls it forth. That busy Mrs. Egerton has told him all my foolish story, I am persuaded; for he never mentions his uncle in my presence but as if he had been mine too. Speaking of fortune, I told him, that I should

greatly regret encroaching on his, were I not sure that I could not do so long. He politely replied, that, since he had seen me, he had learnt to fear its restoration. This was peculiarly obliging; and, as Mrs. Egerton was present, I felt doubly gratified. Vanity, our first passion, it is plain survives every other; for I found an inclination to please him; awakened by, I believe, the desire of confuting his aunt's character of me.

Miss Egerton was brought up in the idea of marrying this cousin; and, as is often the case, neither, when old enough to choose, approved the family plan. I cannot but be astonished at her, since in no respect but mental merit was she a match for Captain Percival. To refuse him, and choose Sir George Harington, seems to me fascination. Can title and show have such charms, even for a rational young woman! Percival, indeed, might with reason wish to avoid the match: Sophia is not handsome, and took no pains to please him: he had

every right to make a choice, and, being a man, had the power of doing so.

Sir George returned from town two days after the funeral; and Captain Percival adjusted with him all necessary affairs. They gave into my hands bonds for the ten thousand pounds; and gladly I flew into the parlour to Miss Egerton.

"Believe not," cried I, "my dear Sophia, that any misconception of my character on the part of a lady so nearly allied to you, and to whom, I think, I have never been wanting in respect, can cancel in my mind the obligations I delight to owe to a heart like yours. I would not, it is true, be insulted out of the rights which the law allows; but I have no other pleasure in obtaining those rights, than to convince you that I never for a moment could balance self-interest with esteem. Accept, from a heart truly attached to you, that part of your uncle's fortune which he only gave me the power of making your own."

Mrs. Egerton's spectacles gently made

their escape from her nose to the floor; and though there they lay, in many a shining fragment, the loss was unnoticed, so great was her astonishment. Sophia, with a generous spirit, resolutely refused to accept the ten thousand pounds. Her mother grew at length quite angry, and called her a proud fool. Wearied with the contention, on the entrance of a servant I turned to Mrs. Egerton:—"A witness, madam, may be necessary to make this transfer legal. I put into your hands, to bestow at pleasure on your daughter, the ten thousand pounds which your brother was pleased to bequeath me; and only hope, that, in return, you will henceforward treat me with the complaisance due to a name which was once your own."

How did the old lady's countenance change, when she found that I really meant what I said! Sophia, however, long remained vexed and half sullen. I dined in my own room, as the lawyers were with the gentlemen; and, in the

course of the afternoon, up ran Miss Egerton, bursting with laughter at her mother's having robbed Ned of his dinner, by beginning my panegyric at the moment it was set on the table. So extraordinary a change, without any cause that he could guess at, surprised him beyond measure. His cousin soon afterwards whispered him whence it arose; and he had then almost as much difficulty in keeping his countenance, as she had found in preserving hers.

Mrs. Egerton talks of going to London, as soon as Sir George is at leisure to attend them; and, when decorum allows, I imagine the wedding of my friends will take place. Do I flatter myself too much, in hoping for your company when they leave me? I may have that of Captain Percival, I fancy; but, unless you are with me, he has no chance of an invitation. I have long been an object of attention to the tatlers here, and he is too near my own age.

LETTER CVI.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Rock House.

SINCE I have breathed freely, and felt what it is to possess the comforts of life without exertion, though the grief of my heart can never be forgotten, its severe irritation has doubtless been much assuaged. Ah! who should assuage it but my Amelia! I hardly hoped for as much peace on this side the grave, as I experienced in the two months which you passed with me. This wild and lovely scene added charms to those communications which sweetened our hours, and softness to reflexion when we were separated. Poor Percival bewails your loss no less than myself, for I am now to him almost an invisible person. I cannot allow you to smile when I name him, or to think I have any reason for shutting my

door on him but that which respects his own peace. An attachment like the one he shows me, is calculated to flatter a refined heart; and having never known the kind of regard which a brother, an amiable brother, would excite, I dare not pronounce the partiality I feel for him to be fraternal—but it is certainly not impassioned. Ah! if I hide my tears, think you that I have ceased to weep for Lord Westbury? Young Percival's generosity, in never, for one moment, regretting the diminution of his income through me; the watchful respect by which he restored my consideration in this busy place; the evident pleasure he finds in my society—render it painful to me to restrict his visits. However, I now only oblige him almost to live on horseback, that he may hover near my habitation. If he sees me not, he comes, impatient to know whether I am sick; and if I ride out, he is at the side of the chaise. He anticipates the servant at the post-house, and either gets my letters, or hastens to acquaint me that

there are not any for me. I am sure of a visit on some pretence or other. He told me yesterday a most surprising piece of news: that Sir George Harington insists on thirty thousand pounds with Miss Egerton; which provokes her mother, who meant, during her life, to retain the bonds I incautiously put into her hands. What is yet more strange, Miss Egerton is still desirous of marrying Sir George: she writes to me almost daily. Alas! how unlucky is it for me that she should have formed an intimacy with Lady Diana Selwyn! She sends me volumes of her praises. I will not allow myself to envy, but is it in nature that I should love her? Yet how can I silence my thoughtless friend, without confessing an attachment which it is my interest now to bury in oblivion? Lord Westbury!—oh, she tortures me with him, too! She informs me that he is daily expected in town; the settlements are engrossing, and the wedding on the point of taking place: that Lady Diana is sitting for a whole-length

picture, while that of my Lord is already taken. Alas, my dear! this intelligence, so long expected, struck through my very soul. Hope sometimes spins itself so fine, that we know not our hearts hang on it, till the invisible fibre is snapt by certainty. But, ah! with what an overwhelming weight do they then drop, never more to recover their spring!

Lady Diana talked to Sophia of him. She commended his dignity, the sweetness of his temper, but, above all, his sincerity. Ah! does sincerity, think you, my dear, come into the catalogue of his virtues? Would that I could say so! My friend is impatient to see this fascinating creature, with whom all the world seem in love. She speaks truly: all who mention Lord Westbury conspire to give you that favourable impression, which he knows so well how to improve, and which his very look confirms. Alas! am I, then, the only wretch for whom he has forfeited this character! What heavy crime had I committed, that I should be punished

with loving him! and what, still heavier, that I should become the single instance of his injustice! Happy, happy Lady Diana! Secured by your inherited advantages from the bitter trials which have crushed me, you bring to the man whom you deign to choose, all that can endear or adorn human life—birth, merit, title, wealth. You may, with pride, with glory, avow those sentiments which hearts equally tender must struggle to hide, be condemned for feeling, and, after languishing under every species of calamity, break with at last. Such is the lamentable conclusion of a passion conceived for a superior.

That woman is surely the happiest of her sex who matches with her equal; and finds, in the middle rank of life, employment for every faculty. The diligence of the husband out of his house, is quickened, when he considers the dependence which all within it have on his exertions; while the wife, busied in the various duties comprised in that title, finds only just leisure

enough to render the meeting of the married lovers enjoyment. You can guess where I stole this picture. Instead of suppressing, as is usually done, the first attachment of well-educated girls, it ought, if not utterly censurable, to be countenanced by parents. Ambition and vanity are then checked by the anxious desire of pleasing. Our sex, when once truly attached, have, unhappily for themselves, a propensity to be constant; and rarely, if well treated, seek abroad for forbidden pleasures. The heart of a young married woman is occupied at once with proper employments; nor cherishes passions and caprices which in time destroy either honour or temper. All the tenderness which in maturer life too fondly centres in one object, is then divided between her children; and, as is the case in medicine, from a poison it becomes a balm.

But when, by choice or chance, the affections have reached their full extent before any individual engages them, he

suddenly becomes, not the pleasure only, but the business, the danger, the torment, of our lives: in short, our very fate. The whole world bows before that single being: he, alone, seems worthy distinction, nay adoration. The blindness of love can convert faults into beauties. We interpret every occurrence our own way; and whatever he says, whatever he does, has a grace, a sweetness, a charm unutterable! Oh, my dear! idolatry was the sin of the female world: men, indeed, talk of tenderness, but it is women only who feel it. From the rough draught of their souls we take the hint; but owe to our own the rich colouring, the delicate warmth, that alone can render the labour a delight.

The romance of my heart I do not fear to expose to my friend; but with the larger class of our acquaintance I know but one way of living in comfort, which is, by adopting a custom common enough in the world—I mean, veiling your character from all but the chosen few,

and being content to steal on to the grave unnoticed and unknown. Your pride is not wounded on finding your acceptation in society unequal to your merit, if you once can fancy that merit has never been rendered obvious. Would you take off your vizor at a masquerade, and expose your face to the critiques of all those who hide their own? Life is, alas! only a general masquerade; and those who show their minds unmasked, are treated with the utmost severity.

I know not what I have been writing for this half hour, for Captain Percival has gained admission, and sits watching my pen, in hopes that each stroke will be the last.

Adieu!

LETTER CVII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Rock House,

A LETTER, which I have received this morning, informs me that I have no longer a friend named Miss Egerton. Lady Harington, indeed, is even vehement in her claims on my equal regard. She is full of the etiquette attending her new situation: I should say, going through purgatory to heaven, but that there is no heaven on earth for any but tender lovers.

I wrote last week a long letter of anxious expostulation to Sophia, which she has answered so characteristically that I cannot avoid quoting hers: yet, in the opinions which she avows, there is a pleasantry that would be dangerous, were she handsome. When I talk of "loving so long and so well," she says (as re-

ferring to my letter), I am totally out of her comprehension; since to hope, to fear, to mourn, so *very, very* long, for any human being, is what she has never formed an idea of. "Besides," adds the whimsical girl, "what should I get by this romantic notion of matrimony?—the unsought-for honour of being enrolled among the worshipful company of old maids; since I have not a form like my sweet Cecilia's, nor a face like that of the lovely Diana." Then (still referring to my letter) she adds, "You say, that when a man has pursued a wrong road for forty years, it is not likely that he should jog on the rest of his life in the right one. This admits of discussion, my friend. Is there not a greater chance of persuading a person who is already tired with the pain and vexation of a faulty conduct, into renouncing the illusion which misled him, than to influence the resolutions of a young man, to whom pleasure is yet an *ignis fatuus*, and whose principles fluctuate? Curiosity leads to

vice, and vice to youth appears adorned in the gayest colours; through which the eyes accustomed to reflexion pierce at once: while poor Virtue, especially if she borrow no handsomer a face than that of your little friend, is far from attractive. Observe, that I always presuppose a tolerable share of understanding in the parties. Surely our fidelity and tenderness are more likely to be valued by men who well know how rarely those virtues are found, and how little they deserve to find them, than by the very young, while all the passions are afloat, and poor Reason gets a thump if she comes across any of them. Nay, want of beauty, that terrible defect to young men in a wife, becomes to those who are older, if they can once like the woman, but an additional security to their honour and their peace. Is there not, too, a pride in conferring a favour? and what favour can we possibly do a fine young fellow, rich and handsome, in marrying him? He is soon led to believe that the favour rests solely on his own side;

and is cruel enough to make you his slave, because he has been ridiculous enough to make you his wife. No, no, no: give me a man in whom vanity is decaying, rather than gaining ground; and one of these it must do, from the cradle to the coffin. I should make a fine figure in the world with so many faults of my own, if I were to choose a man with even more than myself. No, my dear little Percy (for so I will call you in defiance of law and your own choice), since governing, or being governed, are the only two ways to render a matrimonial life endurable, think not that I will give up my right of youth, and poorly submit to the last. There, now; you see I *have* thought upon this doughty subject, more than madcaps of my age and temper usually do.

"Your advising me to lay aside *all my follies*, is pleasant enough. Did not the honest man choose me for them? Oh, I respect his judgement, and will keep them, for his sake: therefore set your heart at ease, my dear, for I expect no happier

portion for mine. Your Hymeneal paradise is as seldom attained as your celestial one; and both *(entre nous)* require more sacrifices than I am disposed to make. Sir George Harington, believe me, takes your little Sophia for a mere mortal; and his valet must powder his head in a better taste, before I mistake him for an angel. Some wicked old poet has presumed to steal my idea, when he says, that,

"To our defects we're for the match in debt,
And but for faults on both sides ne'er had met."

With these specious notions of happiness, has this charming young woman bound herself for life to a man whom she only likes by not hating. Mrs. Egerton, it is to be hoped, thinks her a dutiful daughter; since that praise is all which she may get to compensate for years of anguish, I rather condole than rejoice with her. But perhaps she has not sensibility to feel for herself as I do for her. Yet she has generosity; and the soul where

that virtue thrives, may foster every other.

A choice contradicting the judgement, is the error which one half of the world never forgive, and the other never censure. Would people either appear as they are, or act up to what they appear, where would be the difficulty of fixing? But such is the cruelty of custom, that the most essential point to domestic comfort—viz. temper—can never be known till too late. Visits, balls, and the light conversations of gay parties, are no tests of that; and the woman risks too much in the opinion of the world, in case the match goes off, who enters into the familiarity which is necessary to strip off that unconscious disguise produced in both parties by the wish of pleasing.—But what a long history am I making! Love, alas! delights in overturning all the systems of happiness which are constructed by the understanding. I know only one exception to this rule, and need hardly add,

that you and Mr. Forrester constitute it.

Yet the boundless influence of this passion over the weak and ignorant part of the species, still more surprises me: often does it cause madness, and sometimes suicide. How bitterly must such persons suffer, before either consequence is produced. Yet never, surely, do they know an anguish like that felt by hearts which are refined and quickened by education, yet constrained by delicacy and decorum. Alas! what do such gain by their mental superiority, but to be whole years in dying! Heaven knows how time may operate on my feelings or change my ideas, but at this moment hopeless love appears to me the greatest evil in human life. That exquisite warmth which a true and tender passion diffuses through the heart, only renders it more sensible to the chilling touch of despair; against which, memory alone, of all our various faculties, seems proof.

My health, my dear, about which

you so kindly inquire, fluctuates continually. Shattered nerves give me dreadful head-aches; want of rest increases the pain in my side: add to this the ache in my heart, and you may imagine my state. Nevertheless, I do not think my lungs hurt, for I yet sing; which, in a consumption, is, I am told, impossible. I have left off the waters here, and would quit the place; but whither can I go? You say that Lord Westbury is frequently at Arlington, or I would come to you. What carries him thither so often I wonder? Why does he not stay with his Lady Diana?—what, but to cross the only wish of mine which he had not before wholly extinguished.

Percival, too, distresses me. He hints at a hopeless and eternal attachment: he never names the object, but his eyes will not be misunderstood. Oh, my dear! what a wretched choice has he made! I dare not check him, lest I should seem to take an interest in his complaints. His temper is admirable; for though I am

peevish, he is even happy to be huffed so I will but employ him. Once a heart like his would have made me a happy woman: now——Oh, Amelia!

LETTER CVIII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

STILL rich in friends, I have every hour as much reason to admire the candour and affection of my own sex, as to wonder at the arts and falsehood of the other. The gay, I hope the happy, bride, has left all the *eclat* of her new condition, to warm the sad and solitary heart she loves. But you would never guess what brought her hither in such haste: only to restore the ten thousand pounds; which she, it seems, had obliged Sir George to extort from her mother, merely for that purpose. I have been overborne between them, and received a bond for the sum; which bond, to be ingenuous with

you, I put into the fire the moment I was alone.

They are going to Percy Vale, Sir George's estate in Yorkshire. The house is fitting up for the reception of his bride; and she has undertaken to have Orange Hill prepared for mine. There I have agreed, finally, to seek my home; and so delighted my Sophia, that I would fix there were the house my aversion. On the contrary, she assures me that it is a sweet little modern building, but furnished at present in a most uncouth military style. As soon as she has settled me there, she means to hasten back to town: after a stay of a few weeks she will then return to Yorkshire, where she proposes passing most of her time. With a heart formed for pleasure, Lady Harington can find or give it in any place: she is the idlest creature living, yet has an alertness which makes her seem always busy. A mere plaything in the hands of nature! One cannot think what would have become of her had she been poor; nor, indeed, of

the numbers of unhappy wretches whom she delights to succour. No human being ever knew so well how to lighten obligation: it seems as if she were born but to bestow. Yet the dear Sophia spends a little on herself too; for she dresses elegantly, which she insists to be absolutely necessary when a woman is not handsome: of course, you always see her at her best. When she orders cards, you may guess her contempt for her companions; and when she prates, as she modestly terms her conversation, how much she likes them. The gayest, frankest, pleasantest of associates, you freely discuss every thing with her but the heart: and you may judge whether hers be too active when I tell you, that, in all our hours and days of loneliness, I have never been tempted to own to her what makes mine so heavy. Her qualities interest, her manners amuse; and we cannot but wonder, when we grant her so much, that we withhold any thing.—

Friends of this description are the most eligible associates for unhappy lovers. Sympathy is, to them, but a slow kind of mental poison. It is therefore that I am better in Lady Harrington's circle than in yours. Do not be offended at this declaration:—alas! it only proves the excess of my affection. If I dread your society, it can be only from loving it too well.

Wasting spirits and decaying strength, will, of necessity, at some hours awaken in my mind the most serious and important considerations. Far from all on whom I dote, I may perhaps regain composure, and wean my soul alike from its cares, its sorrows—its vain, its fond repinings. Were I to accept your offer, my employment in your house would be to watch the windows of Arlington Court: I should, perhaps, die at the sight of a carriage; and, from the expectation, live in a continual tremor. Lord Westbury will carry his bride thither, to cele-

brate their nuptials. I should become the melancholy witness of rejoicings which would inevitably hasten my funeral: I should be obliged, perhaps, to meet this splendid pair in all the glare, the ostentation of happiness. Oh, Amelia! I do not need a misery so exquisite! I shall suffer enough, only to know that he is married.

Let me, then, retire into Yorkshire, or any where, so that I may escape this last, this most grievous of all trials. Let me seek some sombre scene, where nothing of my former hopes will be presented to my mind: where, alone with God and my own soul, I may meditate upon obtaining that peace hereafter, which a cruel, tyrannic man denies me here. I have "turned my eyes inward" already, and found follies and errors enough to correct; but as in themselves they brought their punishment, I humbly hope that they may be forgiven. Death has, therefore, to me lost much of its horrors; yet I fear all

those which are incidental to the struggles of mortality;

"For groans, and weeping friends, and ghastly blacks,
Distract us with their sad solemnity:
The preparation is the executioner.
Death 's Nature's hospital, that 's always open
To take the wretched in, when they have drain'd
The sweets of life, and worn their days to age or evil.
Then why should I delay? or fondly fear
T' embrace this soft repose—this last retreat?
I, who, like blossoms with'ring on the bough,
Died in my birth, and almost was born old?"

Lady Harington tears me at once from this awful subject: the whole house is in motion at her voice, and this little retirement as busy, in proportion, as the metropolis. The day has cleared up unexpectedly, and she decrees that we must drive to Kings-Weston, and drink tea at the Doctor's: all denial is, I well know, vain. Sir George now seems to adore her whom before he only loved; and finds, in his latter days, the delight of at-

taching a woman of virtue and understanding. I could almost think with her, that disparity of years rather adds to, than lessens, domestic felicity:—but, ah! the heart can then have no share in it! I will write again before I leave Bristol.

LETTER CIX.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Orange Hill.

HITHER, in spite of all my promises to you, has this gay, changeable, married girl dragged me, at a few hours' notice. News came that her house and mine were ready: the horses were immediately called for; the servants left behind; and away we drove. But it presently appeared that expeditious plan would not do for your poor exhausted Cecilia; we therefore proceeded more slowly. Travelling was once the delight of my life; nor did I ever conceive that

it would be otherwise: but, alas! the mind and body are so closely united, that one must suffer with the other.

Yesterday, however, set us down at our different homes; and I must own, that, had Colonel Percival built his little retreat under my auspices, it could not have been more completely to my taste. Lady Harington came hither rather than to her own house, lest the great mansion should make the little one appear to disadvantage: but, in truth, she need not have feared it; as my dwelling, though small, is much more elegant than hers. Having driven through a noble wood of oaks that skirts Sir George's park, you then walk through a winding shrubbery, now almost a wilderness, to the garden entrance, which is a rustic kind of portico, composed, as I think, of the trunks of beech-trees, whose enwoven tops form a just point within. Round each of these natural pillars, roses and woodbines hang their fading glories, and scatter them on the semicircular steps. A hall receives you,

finished with stucco in pale green, and ornamented with statues and orange-trees. On the right hand is a large drawing-room, with sashes that reach to the ground, both in front and behind the house: the back windows are shaded with a natural trellis of jasmine, and those in the front by a vine, which drops over the panes of glass a profusion of clusters that the summer sun will make transparent. On the left hand is an eating-parlour, in which is yet the furniture fixed by the Colonel; and, truth to say, it looks as if he had no objection either to a large company or a good dinner. Behind the hall is a third room, opening to a paddock, netted around, and fringed with a variety of flowers and shrubs. The sashes all throw up high enough for you to pass to the steps; on which, vases of various plants and indescribable beauty are every where ranged. Thus, with the comfort of a house, you have here all the odours of a conservatory. Above stairs there are three elegant chambers, and two dressing-

rooms: those for the servants, as well as offices of every description, lie on one side of the house, buried among trees, and invisible. Lady Harington, knowing well my taste, has furnished the larger apartment something between a library and a drawing-room. The chairs and sofas are of bamboo, with chintz furniture lined and fringed with green. Book-cases are fixed in every recess, and between them are placed baskets and stages of various plants, which finish the rustic charm of the scene. The apartment meant for me above, is furnished with muslin, lined with pale yellow, and ornamented with a fringe of dark mulberry, slightly mingled with silver: it is elegant, and worthy of the donor. A natural slope before this charming cottage gives you a full view of Sir George's house, which is a heavy unmeaning building, that, were it not for a fine sheet of water and some forest scenes, would almost spoil my prospect. The right hand is wholly obscured by the offices and thicket: the left carries the

eye, through a winding road, to a cheerful village; where a walnut-tree, of growth immemorial, had assembled, at the moment I first saw it, men, women, and children, under its shade; all of whom were employed in various sports in honour of our arrival. Behind, are only a few artless walks, and some fields belonging to this ornamented cot; among which are fixed rustic seats, to mark the points of view for observing the prospects. Ah! what can be wanting to a scene like this, but the disposition to enjoy it? They tell me, too, that the rides all around are beyond measure lovely.

We now adjourned to Percy Vale, the clumsy mansion which I mentioned. I could not but observe that Lady Harington had delicately spared towards herself those elegancies she had bestowed on me. Nothing is to be seen from this house half so pretty as the rustic portico of mine, which is full before it; but the gardens and park are magnificent.

Lady Harington's housekeeper had

provided a pretty little maid to do the common business of my little family; and Mary, as I never needed an attendant on my person, will officiate as cook and housekeeper. A ruddy youth is likewise hired, to prune the garden and go to market:—the first part of his office will not be very troublesome, for I love wild nature, and the shrubs to be overgrown;

"Nor does the breast, where fancy glows,
Deem ev'ry flow'r a weed that blows
Upon the desert plain."

Among the wants of this sweet place is, I am told, a coach-house; but as Lady Harington is so near and kind a neighbour—and I shall probably never go out, unless to church, but in her company—I shall not think of keeping a carriage. Perhaps I may purchase a single-horse chair, which my rustic footman has fallen much in love with, and its owner wishes to sell.

I now write from my drawing-room, green-house, or study—for you may call

it which you will. The windows are all thrown up; the sun chequers the floor through the vine-branches; and the orange-trees and other plants, ranged along the steps, diffuse a variety of sweets —to the soul vigour, and to the senses indulgence.

Oh, Amelia! had either you or I been born to the possession of this small but elegant home, how would our young and animated hearts have delighted in embellishing it! Happy in each other, and with taste to enjoy the scenes around us, the great world had then been ever merely a vision to both; and we might have led, on earth, the lives of angels. Alas, my dear! I could, perhaps, better have borne any other lot than that appointed me. In simplicity and youth I could cheerfully have toiled for my daily subsistence, and laid my weary head, without a sigh, upon my pillow, had this heart of mine been unwrung! Had I, on the contrary, been united to the man of my choice, whatever his degree in life, what labour would not

have been lightened, had he but deigned to commend my diligence.

As it is, I am, in youth, only the shadow of myself—the breathing grave of my own hopes and wishes! and even all the perfection of nature now blooming around, seems as much wasted upon me, as the flowers they scatter on dead bodies. To be cast off without a cause—despised, insulted!—left thus to linger out my days in a sorrow not produced by misconduct!—"Cruel remembrance! how shall I appease thee?"

All the misfortunes of life we can, by comparison, reason, and religion, support: it is those of the heart which alone can subdue us. Just Heaven! are we born only to complain? I fear, I fear it is the sad lot of all who love! From the moment we truly feel that sovereign passion, restlessness, irresolution, never-ceasing apprehension, intrude with it, and prey for ever on our peace. I remember, I alike repined when I lived in the house with Lord Westbury; when I spent every

hour in the hope of seeing him the next; when I believed his heart to be mine, and knew my own to be his. How exquisite a felicity does this now appear!—What strange creatures are we all, naturally! Destined ever to lose the present by an anxious anticipation of the future, till that which was the future being arrived, we look back on the past with regret.

I hardly knew how to refuse Captain Percival a welcome at a house of which I had innocently robbed him—at least for a time. In parting with me he often got as far as his wishes; but not daring to express their tendency, or trust his failing voice, he would turn from me, to conceal the delicate, the generous sensibility. I most sincerely wished him a lot much more happy than that he wished himself. The Misses Frazier (who always keep up their state, and address themselves to me as their uncle's widow and a dowager of threescore) "waited upon me to take leave;" but my languid looks interested not them:—caps, balls, and concerts,

formed their whole conversation. Percival, from behind the chair of the eldest, cast up his eyes ruefully, with a shrug so emphatic, that Lady Harington nearly laughed out.

I see her coming, with her pretty low carriage and elegant ponies: I know that she will have me, so I may as well conclude. No more of complaining when she appears. It is my interest to persuade myself that I am happy, and to find its old charm in every object around me.

Adieu!

LETTER CX.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Orange Hill.

TENDER indulgent friend! how touching is every instance of your kindness! *Does* my society make a beautiful

scene like this unnecessary?—*am* I a little world in myself? I know this to be only the innocent flattery of a partial heart; and though I cannot believe it, I feel almost as much pleasure as if I did. To the world at large we are content to pass as common persons, and to be estimated only by general appearance; but to the chosen few, each individual would, in turn, be eminently amiable, and

"Snatch a grace beyond the reach of art."

Sir George and his lady are already gone to town, and I am in a manner alone, except for a few remote neighbours, to whom I have been, by their means, introduced. Mr. Joseph, my serving-man, and not unworthy that patriarchal name, has prevailed on me to buy the chair which I mentioned: he drives, and I ride about, almost all day. The air and exercise keep me alive, I really believe; for I return so weary, that even pain cannot enable me to hold my eyes open. Yesterday I went further than usual, having re-

solved to rest at a little rustic inn delightfully situated. I saw, at some distance, a large mansion almost in ruins; and understood, at the turnpike, that it was of a Gothic manor-house which had been built by the first baron of the Westbury family: an estate of some extent appertains to it. This, I imagine, was the retreat that my Lord once proposed for my residence: a farmer and his family are, as he told me, its only inhabitants. To be so near any place where Lord Westbury is master, would alarm me, but that he never comes here, as the country people affirm. The situation, though low, seems sweetly pleasant, such woody knolls shelter it: and the land is rich to a wonder. In short, Nature having done so much as to leave little room for the operations of Art, it became a less desirable situation to the owner than those which, by requiring alterations, at once exercise the taste and empty the purse. I know not your boasted Arlington; but great indeed must be its beauties, if they

exceed those of this Yorkshire residence. Here, too, we

"Tread soft and lonesome o'er the vales;"

An indulgence that I think you cannot possess.

Profound solitude is a kind of pleasure for which I have a peculiar taste; at least, at this juncture of my life. To the tumults of wounded sensibility and mortified pride, a kind of misanthropy succeeds in my soul: I no longer wish for any society; nor could I be gratified now even by that of friendship. The forms of life fatigue me; and the necessity of finding suitable topics of conversation in mixed company, is an insupportable toil. Yet do I think my nature is, notwithstanding, by slow degrees recovering its energy. The spirits, fermented by passion, first subside into a stupefaction, and at length refine themselves into a calm. I sometimes recollect my past life as the dream of madness. Good heaven! is it possible that self-love should ever be so totally ex-

tinguished! Yet even this extravagance may have its good consequence. In Lord Westbury I have been so long accustomed to comprise every human good, that, when detached from him, I am so, in a manner, from the whole world.

This bitter trial, then, may have early decided my fate; but it likewise has prepared me for it. The glories of heaven dawn on the afflicted soul with double lustre. Had I enjoyed all that I fondly imagined, what could Heaven itself have given me more? I might then, perhaps, have cast an eye of regret on this sublunary scene, even at the hour when I was destined to quit it. As it is, I look upon this world without hope, and on the next without fear. What have I to give up, but you?—And if I thought virtuous attachments between souls ended in the grave, I must doubt a future existence. Such attachments are, surely, our foretaste of immortality.

Among the many prospects which finely diversify this country, about se-

ven miles hence are the ruins of a noble castle. I have a natural attachment to those venerable monuments of human exertion and genius. Herds of cattle browsing on the bold bastions, hang over the edge, and, where busy soldiers once watched the most distant access, low languidly around. Ragged openings in the parts yet standing, show the attacks which the fortress once sustained; and huge towers, now only heaps of stones, with what a force they fell. Joseph drives me thither every hot day; and, having procured a shelter for the horse with a peasant who lives in some of the fragments, I sit in the open carriage, and read for hours under the shade of a romantic nodding arch. From this ascent, an immense tract of rich country almost bewilders the sight: —forests, winding valleys, more winding streams, and scattered hamlets. Over these varying objects I wander with a a feeling

"Lost to the sons of power; unknown to half mankind!"

Country people, who never have an idea of this kind of pleasure (how astonishing it is that they should not!) consider mine as a very strange propensity. I have lost much of their confidence by these wild rambles: they think me a little crack-brained; and do you know that I fancy myself a gainer by their opinion? It leaves me a power of choosing time, places, and persons; and exonerates me if I should, as is very likely, be wanting in some rustic civility. I send you the first fruits of my rambles.

ON RETIRING INTO THE COUNTRY.

Oh! let me not the scanty moments waste
In search of pleasures I could never taste,
But quit at once the world's delusive arms,
While Envy proves to me I yet have charms!
No more for me are henceforth spread its snares;
I loath its ecstacies, I shun its cares!
Rend the bright web romantic Fancy wove;
Abjure the essence of its sorrows—Love!
Return, ye virgin-sisters of gay Youth,
White-vested Peace, Simplicity, and Truth;

Rear in this heart, with fond delight, his bow'rs,
And lead in playful bands the length'ning train
of Hours!
Ah, fruitless wish! Who leaves thy happy cot,
Simplicity, must seek through life the spot.
In vain for me the varying seasons roll;
Nor sun nor shade revive the wither'd soul:
From scene to scene in vain this form I bear,
By busy motion to beguile despair;
For Love, more rapid, floats upon the gale,
And with his wild creation fills each vale;
Wings his bold course o'er the tempestuous wave;
Nor leaves a single refuge but the grave.
Hail, then, thou cold asylum! solemn cell!
Where Darkness and Oblivion ever dwell.
In thee the wicked can no more molest;
In thee the weary find eternal rest;
In thee are lost pow'r, beauty, wealth, and fame—
The happy and unhappy sleep the same.
O thou Supreme! whose chastisements approve
The chosen objects of thy holy love;
If erst, obedient to thy sacred will,
I humbly strove its precepts to fulfil;
Ere human tears were shed for human cares,
And my soul panted with impassion'd prayers;
Ere grief began my temper to destroy,
And the long years drew nigh in which I have
no joy;
If now, my cherish'd errors to atone,
I drink my tears, and stifle ev'ry groan;

To me thy noblest bounty early give—
That awful hour for which alone we live!
Thou cold conductor to our heav'nly home,
Come, Death! gigantic king of shadows, come!
To those who fearless gaze, thy terrors cease;
Till, dove-like, messengers of promis'd peace
Around thee with ethereal glories play,
And angel-forms illumine all thy way.
Pure flow'rs of Paradise enwreath that rod
Whose wond'rous touch restores my soul to God,
And blends my ashes with their native sod.
Oh! when wilt thou these weary eye-lids close?
When wilt thou give this heart a long repose?

The early lines were written when my embittered spirit sought to discharge its woes in all their asperity. I no longer feel them in the force they appeared to me at that moment to possess; for I am much altered in temper since that period. A dull tranquillity benumbs my soul; or, rather, that soul, touched by despair, can no more recover its spring. Our mental strength seems to waste with that of our body, till a powerful struggle, instead of producing the variety of torments which

we languish under in health, at once ends us. Yet am I not melancholy: a solitary, a religious tendency softens my nature, and half-obliterates the sense of my past sufferings. Good heaven! how inexcusably blind does an unfortunate attachment render us, to all but itself! I have wandered through the sweetest scenes, unconscious of their beauty:—the sun was once too dim to light, the winter too powerless to chill, the summer to warm me. Night, still Night, brought with it no repose; nor Innocence, nor God himself, a comfort. That fearful paroxysm is past:—Nature, in all her vast variety of charms, again affects my senses, my heart, my understanding! I now see and I adore, in every hour and every season, the peculiar attribute which God has affixed to it. Nothing now appears either insipid or dismal: the sweet remembrance of past beauty quickens the enjoyment of that which is yet ripening. I feel shocked at my culpable indulgence of a weak passion. May he who animated

my heart with this too-poignant sensibility, pardon its involuntary misapplication!

I flatter myself that I shall, in time, become a very good kind of country gentlewoman; for I have taken to match-making already. Sally, my pretty little maid, I have married to the lad who was her fellow-servant; and Mary, to Sir George's bailiff. Joseph, it seems, was the only son of a thriving farmer; who, a week since, came to lay before my high-mightiness all his catalogue of complaints: and had I relied upon him, I should have turned poor Sally out of doors at once. However, I contented myself with giving him a hearing, and promising to inquire into the affair. Persuaded that the fate of the young couple was decided by this application, old Grub took his leave; only hoping that I would send his idle boy home and make him mind his business. I called first for the poor girl, who came in as white as her apron. I remonstrated with her on the crime of exciting a son

to rebellion; and assured her, that she could stay in my house only by persuading the lad to return to his father. She appeared thunderstruck at first; then, bursting out in a flood of tears—"No, Madam!" said she, wringing her hands; "though you are the kindest, dearest, best of mistresses poor girl ever had, I will rather beg my bread than do as you bid me. Joe is my cousin—my very own first cousin—and he has promised to marry me; nay he must, or I shall make away with myself—I never shall live over it."

I was affected with this innocent sorrow, and comprehended from it what I had been child enough not to form an idea of before.

"Sally!" said I with a faultering tone, yet twinkling away a tear that I might appear consequential; "have you, then, been weak enough to make it necessary for this lad to fly in his father's face?"

She was all colours in a moment, and

only replied by louder sobs; when, lo! Mr. Joseph, who it seems had been listening at the door, no longer able to resist his feelings, rushed into the room, and, clasping the terrified creature in his arms, exclaimed—"Sally, my love! only tell Madam the truth, the whole truth, and she wo'nt have the heart to be angry!"—Sally, however, far from taking her lover's advice, buried her face on his shoulder—glad, perhaps, to escape from herself and me; or rather feeling protected in the presence of him whom she loved. You will grant my situation grew awkward: I was too young a woman to reprove a man on such a subject, and too dignified a personage, by situation, to overlook the frailty. I was likewise too artless to know how to get rid of him, and so was compelled to keep up my consequence.

"I do not understand, Joseph, your intrusion into this room uncalled for."

"To be sure, Madam, it was very bowld, that I do know; but I could not help it. I could not hear you so mad

with poor Sally, and she cry so, without coming in. Beside, I knowd feyther had been here making his orations."

I was answered—nay, more, I was pleased with the honest warm affection of the rustic.

"But if you are hurt at Sally's crying," said I, looking as sagely as possible, "why have you been wicked enough to give her occasion for these tears?"

"Because," answered he, glowing with a handsome ruddiness, "I was a fool:—that is all. Thank God I am no knave, as feyther would have me be: but had I been worthy to know his mind, I would have gone for a soldier, or any where, rather than see this day. Sally, my love," cried he, clasping the poor girl still closer; "don't cry so—never heed feyther: I will make thee an honest woman thof a ware to forbid the banns a hundred and a hundred times over. Let him keep his money if he have the conscience: he can't hinder we from using our hands sure, and I can maintain my Sally."

Here was a lover, Amelia, worth an army of men of fashion! My heart partook a fond though vulgar transport; and vowed their happiness, whatever the price. Sally, hearing me speak encouragingly, looked up; and, supported by her lover, stammered out their little story; which was a very simple one. Their mothers were sisters, and married to neighbouring farmers. Joseph was placed with Sally's father, who always intended that he should marry her: all the folks knew this, and nothing but the ceremony was wanting, when Sally's father sickened and died. He had always been supposed to be the richer of the two: but his brother found his affairs so perplexed, that his effects hardly paid his debts. No more of the wedding from that moment. Sally went to her uncle's house as a dairy-maid, under her cousins:—but, alas! I comprehended that Sally had previously—by a confidence too common among rustic lovers, and a little excusable from her having no mother to advise or guard her—

trusted the peace of her life to Mr. Joseph's honour; and on his integrity was her whole reliance. He insisted on marrying his Sally; but his father forbade the banns, and ill-treated the girl, who was already half broken-hearted, in proportion to the obstinacy of his son. At length he turned her out of doors, and she betook herself to my service; whither her lover followed her, till the three months which he wanted of being of age should expire, when he might lawfully marry her. However, I had sense enough now to perceive that she could not wait these three short months, without being the scoff of the village.

What could be done to save the poor girl! Gold is a universal panacea; and I thought a little might act on the old man as an emollient. I sent for the savage, but I found him a mere country miser. He had reckoned on Sally's having fifty pounds to begin the world with; and this he insisted on, without agreeing to give his son any thing till his death.

I had a great mind to disappoint him, less from grudging the money, than vexation at being overborne by a clown; but finding that he would not yield, I did: Sally's tears, and her lover's integrity, were worth twice the sum. Oh, what a joy did this unhoped event pour into their faithful honest hearts! Mary had served me too well not to deserve an equal marriage-portion; and the weddings were celebrated at my expense, and honoured by my presence, with that of all the rural world. The defect in our younger bride's shape was hardly thought a blemish, now she was made an honest woman of; and the miserly father got as drunk, with joy, as if his son had married the lady of the manor. We mustered up a blind fiddler, and I gave the ball in Sir George's green-house, which was cleared on the occasion. Sally is so pretty, that our other bride (but for the dignity of virtue) had no chance of being noticed in her company; and so modest, as not to forget former mishaps in her present fe-

licity. But as to Joseph, what mortal would he have changed fates with! An air of exultation at his own integrity, unmixed with that fearful refinement so common among men in higher life who have found a trusting woman, sat on his features. He seemed to think that he should do well, because he had deserved well; and that Sally had confided in him above all men, because she had loved him above all men. Our day was spent in festivity, and finished, as I observed, by a ball—a ball worth an hundred birth-day ones. I took infinite pleasure in only seeing the rustics laugh: and retired at nine o'clock, while they were all elbowing each other in the dance; hoping that I had yet twilight enough to conduct me home, without damping the pleasure of the party by taking two people from it. As I crept along the verge of the park, the younger bridegroom's heart supplied me ample subject for contemplation. I asked myself, why a mere clown should act with a nobleness of sentiment unknown

in higher life?—Do learning and reflexion undermine, then, those virtues which they are meant to cherish? Ah, no: it is fashion!—that varnish of life, which, being, like all other varnishes, poisonous in its nature, contaminates the heart. I started from these meditations, by hearing a half-strain on the flute not far from me. Music in a wilderness by moonlight, might well recal the fairy and magic tales which once delighted our childhood. I recollected "Ye Woods and ye Mountains unknown;" and, "One Day I heard Mary say"—that exquisite Scots air. Lost in attention, I heeded not the clouding-in of the moon, till it was quite enveloped, and I found myself in impenetrable darkness, in a place very imperfectly known to me at any time. I stopped, and, resting against a tree, waited for the sound of the flute, intending to follow it; but, from the vanishing of the moon, the sound ceased, and a profound stilness succeeded. I was now obliged to retrace my own steps in my mind:

and thinking that I had recollected enough of the way to get back again to the green-house, I set out very valiantly; but turning a corner upon my right hand, ran full against a man. I would have given my life for a doit, so entirely had fear taken possession of me. I remember his inquiring who I was, but I could neither answer nor stir. Even now I cannot guess how I could have rambled almost back again: which was undoubtedly the case, as three minutes brought me into the midst of my dancers; where, in the object of all this foolish fear, I recognised Captain Percival, who had likewise been my guide. I expressed neither surprise nor pleasure at this unexpected rencounter, though I felt both, lest I should encourage him to say more than I wished; but ordering a chaise, threw myself into it as soon as it was ready, and only gave him an invitation to dinner three days afterwards, intending to fortify my intrenchments with a regiment of his country acquaintance. The

next morning, however, deranged my scheme, by presenting this epistle.—

"In addressing myself to you, Madam, I wave form and respect, knowing your contempt for the first, and finding no power in language to express the latter in the degree I feel it. Your accidental discovery of my residence in your neighbourhood, determines me to avow the tender secret which has so long hovered on my lips without once escaping them. Yet I tremble when I own to you that my happiness is in your hands, though well I know that declaration to be my only offence. Ah, who could have foreseen, that, when my uncle himself invited me; when he told me your charms, your merits —who could have foreseen, that, by a mere omission, I destroyed perhaps the hope which you then might not have denied me! Yet my cousin and aunt have both confided to me the manner of your marriage, of which the law would not take cognisance. That would, at once, annul

a rite wholly nominal, and which reason invalidates. Could I believe that you would one day or other consent to derive the name you dignify from a Percival yet living, what should I have to wish? If then, Madam, that fine feeling which renders you so justly dear to all honoured with your friendship, should extend to the man who has, in his ardent though hitherto hopeless passion, the highest claim to it, you will, at length, allow him to take an apparent interest in that precious health and welfare which must for ever include his own.

" But if (as my anxious heart at intervals still forebodes) I should be unable to inspire a passion like that I feel; if I am never to know a happier name than that of your friend; let me not, by this dangerous declaration, forfeit a title so inestimable. The sight of a felicity equal in all degrees, awakened, yesterday evening, too powerfully the feelings of my heart; and the visible fading of that fair frame, the fulness of every sensibility: these

have wrung, at length, a truth from me, which I am already conscious you will not approve, or my eyes must, before now, have learned the blessed hope from yours. Oh think, if so, that I shall be too severely punished in knowing that I can never, in a single instance, contribute to her happiness who will then, for ever, remain the innocent misery of

"EDWARD PERCIVAL."

I have so perfect a regard for this estimable young man, that, in my answer, I was almost as frank as himself.

"TO EDWARD PERCIVAL, ESQ.

"I do not hesitate to acknowledge, Sir, that your letter gave me more uneasiness than surprise. Your uncle was very, very strange in his general conduct; and most so, surely, in the idea he imparted to you. Lady Harington and her mother are more astonishing still; but as this unaccountable confidence in the daughter proceeded from love to me, in the mother

it proceeded only from aversion. I am sensible that the law might deprive me of the name I bear, and restore to you the income I hold. I leave it to yourself to judge on this occasion, and only regret that it is impossible I should ever be allied to you in any other manner than I now am. I will place an implicit confidence in you, to prove how anxiously I wish to obtain your esteem, though I disclaim your attachment.

" By a greater mistake in my choice than this in yours, I have loved, like yourself—in vain. I felt, too poignantly almost for my reason, an unmerited insult, and, without duly considering the consequences, accepted the specious proposal of Colonel Percival: but in marrying him I sacrificed myself to a burning resentment. Such a fault called for chastisement; and Heaven was pleased to send mine in the fault. There are, alas! prepossessions too powerful to be extinguished by reason, duty, or time: to such a one

I am the wasting victim, and have nothing to bestow on you but the compassion I demand.

"I think I owe it to your merit to acknowledge, that once a heart like that I now decline would have fulfilled my wishes; but never since I knew Captain Percival. Were it possible that I could lose the remembrance of one dear, though worthless, object, I could never awaken again in my nature a spark of tenderness. You now can no longer mislead yourself; and, by making the effort in time, may escape a grief like that you see me sinking under. The woman whom you have distinguished is too generous to wish you less happiness than you wish yourself. She will ever cherish the true regard which she feels for you, and has no fear of your wronging a confidence that must render you for ever silent both to herself and the world. Rejoin your regiment; calm your agitated mind: this way alone are you able to oblige me."

The servant brought me back this hasty note.—

" If obedience be the test of love, the object of your heart, when most anxious to please, could not vie with him whom you reject. I have ordered my horses, and leave you, Madam, perhaps (oh, agonising *perhaps!*) for ever! Thus far your command is law. But to forget you—how, while you are so barbarously generous, is that possible? You grant that " there are prepossessions too powerful to yield to the united efforts of reason, duty, and time." Do you think it possible that you should inspire a weaker one than you feel?

" I flattered myself your letter, whatever its purport, would lighten my evils; but to learn that there lives a man who might make himself the envy of his whole sex; to whose very falsehood you dedicate a life so valuable to the world at large—so invaluable to the individual who now addresses you—Ages might pass ere

I could express to you the agony which my heart feels at this trying conviction.

" Allow me, at least, always to subscribe myself the most faithful, humble, and devoted, of the many who are impressed with the sense of your merit.

" EDWARD PERCIVAL."

Inured, as I have long been, to sorrow, I could not refuse a few tears to a lover like this. Amiable, interesting Percival! I live to regret that I cannot love anew, and, perhaps, again feel all the misery from which I now am slowly escaping! Would that I could tell how to restore his peace! But his cure and my own is at hand, and the same remedy will relieve both.

LETTER CXI.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

YOU have read and re-read, my dear Amelia, the list of the prizes in the lottery, but never did it enter your head, that, just when she did not want it, your Cecilia came in for one of five thousand pounds. I had, as you well know, a blank, when as many shillings would have been a relief to my mind, though no addition in my calculation of happiness. Lady Harington bought the ticket, and sent it to me the day before she married. The luck, therefore, is hers, and not mine.

I have no earthly use for this money myself, but am pleased to think that I may now save Sir George some trouble, and become my own executor. There is a most valuable woman, married to a man so like herself that he never knows a pain but when he recollects how entirely her

welfare, and that of her children, depend upon his life. To those beloved friends two thousand pounds would be a prize indeed; and that prize was theirs the morning my ticket was drawn. I will neither hear a word against this, nor a syllable of acknowledgement. Sir George Harington will immediately remit Mr. Forrester a draft for the money. Ah, how often have I wished for this power without ever hoping to obtain it!

I have secured an equal sum to my sister, that dependence may never give her a pang like many which I have felt.

The last thousand I mean to employ in promoting young Percival in the army. His fortune is not narrow enough to make this mark of my attention necessary; but as I feel myself an illegal incumbrance on it, I take pleasure in returning the obligation in that mode which I should think would be least disagreeable to him.

Lady Harington delights in my acquisition, though she bought a blank for herself at the same moment. She re-

minds me of the restitution, and alludes to the fable of Mercury and the Woodman.

Her letter gives me an astonishing piece of news: Lord Westbury is, they say in town, a ruined man. I imagine at the gaming-table. Sophia further adds, that she saw his estate in this neighbourhood advertised for sale, while the entailed fortune is thought to be tied up in annuities. Report informs her that an execution is now in his town-house. Good Heavens! how I felt for him, in spite of all, when I read this! His marriage with an heiress like Lady Diana Selwyn, as I thought, totally broken off; but a line or two lower I cast my eyes on her name.

Sophia tells me that she saw Lady Diana the day before; but wanted courage to say a syllable of my Lord, till she heard that sweet creature mention him with her usual partial regard. Ah, lovely Diana! if such be your generous nature, I, even I, must love you! A conduct

like this will (if a reformation be possible in him) incite him to deserve her; for his own liberality is such as to make that appear to him the first of all human virtues. Long, long may they be happy in each other! I, at last, have brought myself to wish even that—wish it without one tear, one instantaneous pang! My soul is, at length, totally subdued to my fortune. I think—nay, I am sure—I have so well considered the future, that I could now meet Lord Westbury with the same composure I could Mr. Forrester. His ill fortune could alone affect me a single moment: for that, I still feel a foolish something yearn fruitlessly at my heart. I have always been more accustomed to study his interest than my own; and hardly can as long a time as we spend in impressing these weaknesses on our minds serve to efface them.

Another packet came this morning from the gay Sophia. Ah, who that sees her can think Heaven has fixed a standard for happiness any more than beauty! I

have known those who surpassed her in every thing but the art of being pleased, and the talent of pleasing. A young lady whom she has taken for a companion is the subject of her present epistle. She dwells upon her modesty, her merit, her beauty (for, wonderful to tell—though without that advantage herself—Lady Harington is charmed with it in her own sex), in terms which might make me think my influence on the wane, did not her frankness show it to be yet undiminished; for the shortness of my letters makes her, she says, so uneasy, that she must hasten here immediately, though Sir George raves about his executorship affairs, and all his business.

Nothing can be more comical than her description of the Fraziers, who, not being able either to brook the legacy which their uncle left me, or my disposal of it, are so formally severe, so politely unpolite, that they never meet their charming cousin without great danger of a quarrel.

Did I ever describe the Fraziers to to you? I think not. Take, then, their portraits warm from a resenting spirit. The eldest is not less than five-and-twenty, and of an uncommon height and size: the magnitude of her person she renders still more obvious by dressing in the extreme of the mode. Her features are too ordinary to attract, but for the sallow hue of her complexion, which is hardly a shade lighter than Omiah's. Her shrewd eyes with an unremitting malignancy survey every other person, except when they are tortured into a variety of directions in hopes of conquest. Awkwardness itself becomes, then, a thousand times more disgusting: each overgrown limb throws itself into something which she calls grace; and her strong coarse voice softens into an almost-inarticulate delicacy. She tinctures all her discourse with a boarding-school smattering of French; and, with a circulating-library knowledge of letters, sits in judgement on every work which she hears mentioned. How often could

I have convicted her of having read only the Review, in which the book in question has perhaps been praised, perhaps blamed, without reason. In short, with just superficial information enough to prevent fools from finding that she has none at all, she is the goddess of a certain circle; where her opinions are received with avidity, and reported with confidence. In short, she

> " Has learnt the art to please,
> With all the charms of labour'd ease.
> Thro' looks and nods, with meaning fraught,
> To teach what she was never taught."

While poor Miss Peggy Frazier, a mere machine,

> " Alike if satire or if praise,
> Still says whate'er her sister says.
> Sure test of others! faithful glass,
> Thro' which the various phantoms pass!
> Wide blank! unmeaning if alone:
> No wish, no care, no thought her own!"

And yet I think the last the most contemptible of the two characters; because

she prostitutes good nature to the purposes of ill, and becomes the vehicle of slander without the talent to invent or the spirit to enjoy it. Nature has not been less bountiful of her coarser materials to this lady than her sister, for she is uncommonly tall and large. A vulgar flush spoils her complexion, which might have been tolerable, and renders more masculine a hard set of features. So just, on consideration, appears this picture, that, could Sophia read it without the names of her cousins, she would cry out—"These can only be the Misses Frazier!"

Such women love only themselves: but as Miss Egerton never was handsome, they had the moderation not to hate her, till she by marriage rose into consequence; for her understanding never became an object of rivalship, as she affects no display. Few, indeed, show a vanity of intellect but such as have little to be vain of; yet admiration is so alluring, that the mind must be independent indeed which is above courting it.

" The proud, to gain it, toils on toils endure;
The modest shun it but to make it sure:"

and, perhaps, those who are truly deserving only bound their desires to obtaining the praise of such as, by their acknowledged merit, render it a homage indeed. Their little cousin—enriched by Colonel Percival, and married to Sir George Harington—completely takes the lead of these daughters of Goliah, and, of course, is abhorred by them. She is too penetrating not to see what she deigns not to notice. Not that Lady Harington wants a certain quickness of character, which often embarrasses those whom she does not like. Piercing eyes are apt to displease, unless they are enlivened by perfect good humour; but as my dear Sophia has always been disliked by those who slightly knew her, so cannot she be thoroughly known without being infinitely beloved. A desire of obliging, an unstudied openness, a playfulness of disposition, blend with her little failings, insomuch that you remember them no

longer: nay, however capable of wounding with her wit, she never resorts to it till very highly provoked. It is certain that she then has the singular talent of uttering, without any apparent discomposure, the most bitter and mortifying truths.

Malevolence and slander Lady Harington alike despises; nor do I recollect any thing she wants to render her irresistible, except sensibility. But though the want of that may prevent her ever rising to the height of happiness, she cannot fall to the depth of misery.

On so dear a subject I could be prolix—perhaps I already have been so.

Adieu, my only friend! Be happy, and tell me often that you are so, lest I should conceive myself forgotten by you too. Pardon the hint; I fear I am a little peevish. A teasing neighbour drove here in the morning, and obliged me to lose the "blessed sun," by playing at picquet all day with her: and this she calls coming to keep me company.

Adieu again!

LETTER CXII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

I DARE believe that the last thing you now expect from me is another surprise; and yet I have one in store which might make us think those extravagant incidents we laugh at in novels probable enough. As to myself, I have already seen and heard of so many extraordinary occurrences, that I am fully persuaded imagination never yet invented circumstances which life has not realised, though, perhaps, not exactly in the same way. Who would think that Lady Harington's lovely new friend should prove my own sister! Yet so it is. After Marianne's blind acquiescence in my aunt's humours, one moment has deprived her of all better prospects, and thrown her, at last, on the world, after being habituated to affluence, of course

less able than your poor Cecilia to bear mortification.

My aunt, too, is perhaps as much to be pitied as despised. Failing remittances obliged her to think of visiting her estates in Barbadoes, and she insisted that Marianne should go too. My sister called at your brother's to learn my address, but Mrs. William Forrester, who always took offence at her being, as she termed it, the fine lady of the family, gave poor Marianne a most chilling reception. Thoroughly piqued, she soon took her leave, and assured Mrs. Forrester that she should never repeat her visit. Too late she recollected that she had quitted the house without the information for which she came. Conscious of having neglected you, she hesitated as to addressing a letter to the Parsonage; when, by one of my aunt's sudden whims, she was hurried aboard; nor could recollect any channel by which, unknown to Mrs. Hertford, she could receive your answer. My aunt was very ill during her voyage, and

so uncommonly fond of my sister, that she made a will, naming her as the sole heiress of her fortune. Mr. Hertford, brother of her late husband, met her on landing, and carried her to his house; where he furnished her with full proofs of the fraudulence of her factor. Attended by an attorney, she set out for her own estate, leaving Marianne to amuse herself among the Hertford family. The first news she had of her aunt was three weeks afterwards, in a letter of invitation, which, to her astonishment, was signed by the name of the very man who had for years plundered her property. This worthless fellow, it appeared, was young, handsome, and artful. My poor aunt fell (as she fancied) in love with him at first sight; and he had soon address enough to save all inquiries into his conduct, by gaining a right over hers.

Had Marianne possessed the spirit of Cecilia, instead of obeying this summons she would have immediately embarked for England: however, she complied with

her aunt's wish, and was carried out of the reach of every one whom she knew; as the Hertford race were in a flame at the ignominious match, and wholly withdrew from the bride's acquaintance. My sister was, however, to meet only with surprises; for the youthful bridegroom, like another Petruchio, had tamed a still more intractable Catharine. All my aunt's whims were disregarded, and *his* only of consequence. Nay, in the true spirit of dotage, Marianne once saw her kiss the very cane with which he beat her. Believe me, this is a literal fact, and no addition of mine.

All hopes of fortune were now at an end, for my aunt's whole property was in the hands of a person who knew its value much better than herself. To crown poor Mary's misfortunes (surely we are a lucky pair!) this grateful bridegroom suddenly discovered that he could like the niece much better than the aunt. You, who know her prudery, can imagine how Marianne received this intimation.

Her first idea was to leave her aunt; but in that country it was not so easy to migrate as in this; nor could she hope to quit the house without the concurrence of the owner. He, it appears, was a Machiavel; for now he contrived to awaken the jealousy of his wife; who soon took the alarm. The villain hoped, no doubt, that my poor sister, when doubly tormented, would finally resort to him, as most powerful or least insufferable; but she took a more prudent step, in disclosing to my aunt her persecution, and her wishes to get out of his reach. The weak woman was too fond of her dear-bought idol to keep any one near her whom he loved better than herself; and, at the risk of, in my opinion, her life, assisted Mary to escape, and supplied her money to carry her home. No ship being ready to sail for England, she immediately embarked in one bound for Lisbon, where she got into the English packet: among the many passengers, she found Colonel Gregg and his lady, our old neighbours; who, on learn-

ing the strange occurrence which brought her into their company, took her under their protection from Falmouth; and Mrs. Gregg being a distant relation of Sir George Harington, called, when in town, on his bride. The name of her companion excited the curiosity of Lady Harington, who soon discovered the affinity between us, but mentioned it not to Mary: that dear girl could not expect to find in Mrs. Percival her nearest relation. In a situation like my sister's, the offer of becoming companion to Lady Harington was very acceptable; and the kind creature was delighted to bring me so unexpected a pleasure.

As to my aunt, Heaven only knows what will become of her, should her tyrant discover that it was by her means my sister got out of his hands!

Lady Harington refuses to part with her new friend; but, were I not sure that Marianne is as cold as fair, I should think it an unwise step to present her continually to the eyes of an old rake

like Sir George. The little allotment I had made, although I was unconscious of her destitute state, will save Marianne from absolute dependence. I would press her to remain here, but that I know she would break in upon my solitary, resigned plan of life, without finding happiness in sharing it. Had she not loved the world and its goods, she had not, perhaps, been at present so situated. With Lady Harington, every thing wears a smiling aspect; and I would wish them ever to do so, both to her and my sister.

So ends the history and the misfortunes of Marianne; who has conceived so rooted an antipathy to our colonies, that, would they crown her queen of Barbadoes, I do not think she would visit it again.

No, I have not lost my little handmaid: nothing can prevail on Sally to leave me. The pleasure of being beloved by her husband, respected by his relations, and able to establish herself creditably, cannot tempt her. Is there a charm

in human life like gratitude? It is only what every honest heart intuitively yields, yet it ever strikes us as an emanation. What an indirect censure on society in general is the surprise which it excites!

A-propos—how have you the face to mention such a word to me? Did I not—without hesitation, without acknowledgement—accept from you the offer of what you must ill have spared from your own wants? Do you grudge me, in turn, the pleasure of indulging myself, and convert the very design into pain?

Deprive me not, my dearest, of the only unchastised delight which Heaven ever gave me! Acknowledgements we can hardly accept from those who are indifferent to us—affection is the only payment of hearts; and that is already so perfect in yours and mine, that it is incapable of addition—especially from so poor a cause as money.

Adieu!

LETTER CXIII.

TO FRANCIS TREVILIAN, ESQ.

Holbert's Hall.

FROM the bustle of George's wedding, and the hurry of his election—from fiddles and fools, do I make my glad escape to-morrow; weary with bowing, hoarse with huzzaing, crippled with dancing, and out of humour, as usual, with every thing.

George is the envy of all the northern beaux. In one month the lucky rogue has carried off Sir Geoffrey Holbert's heiress, whom they had besieged in vain. See what a long head, a tolerable face, a red coat, and a good assurance, will do in this world. The gentleman has turned out just what I thought he would, notwithstanding his parade of sentiment—a mere man of the world: has run away with a woman whom he despises, only to make

his fortune; and forced himself, through her interest, into parliament, only to make a second bargain of his own talents. I would not refuse to grace Sir Geoffrey's forgiveness by my presence, or else you may guess that I had but little inclination to the expedition.

I found the long-hoarded October flowing plentifully—only mixed, I believe, to make it go further, with an equal portion of small beer; and had the satisfaction to hear Sir Geoffrey order that the ox, which he bountifully roasted on the occasion, might not be thoroughly done, that every one might have a bit. As to the bride, what account can I give you of her? She most resembles Vanbrugh's Miss Hoyden; and I verily think, had not a red coat come in her way, would, with that young lady, have married the baker. George laughs either with or at her, according to his company. He has too much sense not to know that he must never think of defending hers. As it was merely from the idea of being highly allied that Sir

Geoffrey—who, by the bye, has no pedigree on his own side to boast—forgave this elopement, most impatiently did he expect my arrival; which was announced to the whole village by the tinkling of three unmusical bells, which the rustic inhabitants are pleased to call a set.

Imagine you see a house which covers about two acres of ground, with casements enough to render it merely a lantern. At the very small iron door of an enormous porch, then imagine you behold Sir Geoffrey Holbert, with a fine white flowing periwig, that whenever he bows he may recover, as old Dryden has it, "with a water-spaniel shake;" and a coat of the date of Queen Anne's coronation, one cuff of which seems enough to make a modern beau a frock. Behind him, let fancy represent to you his rustics duly arranged; their poor thick heads most grotesque in size and appearance (thanks to George's French valet), while their persons are arrayed in fine new liveries of red-and-yellow, which on the short

fellows reach to the quarters of their shoes, and on the tall ones seem no longer than sailors' jackets; for Sir Geoffrey, I understand, very providently orders the whole set to be made of one size and length, that they may suit the next wearers as well as the present ones. Since I have ventured to begin the sketch, I positively will go on with it, however tired I may be. Through these odd myrmidons was I led by their as odd master, whose pre-concerted compliment was suddenly abridged by the necessity of numbering my servants, and making an exact computation of the additional expense which such a suite would cause in his house-keeping. Whether George thought that his eyes could not meet mine, and both keep our countenances, I know not, but it is certain that I had no greeting from him. As I was advancing to a noble oak chair, in which I presume Sir Geoffrey sometimes administers justice, and sometimes comforts himself with a nap, I met a pretty cherry-cheeked girl, who stopped

short, and, placing her hands before her, made me a reverential courtesy. Not doubting, from the description I had heard, that this was George's bride, and willing to acquit myself to the taste of the rustics, I e'en advanced eagerly, kissed the damsel, and wished myself joy of such an acquisition to my family. I was cut short by Sir Geoffrey, who, tugging my sleeve, in a fretful tone cried out "Zookers, my Lord! why, that is my housekeeper!" I must own I entertained, from his manner, a suspicion that more than the house was in her keeping; nor was this, I find, a vague idea. The girl reddened; gave her master a sulky look, me a delighted courtesy, and withdrew. The butler soon appeared, with hock and other refreshments; after which a melancholy pause ensued, broken only by an exclamation, now and then, of the old gentleman, of "Where the devil is this Becky!" and the dispatch of a short footman after a tall one, to summon Mrs.

Clifford; but as, like Job's messengers, not one of these fellows returned, poor Sir Geoffrey, shaking every curl of his wig in a bow that reached to my toes, begged leave to introduce his daughter himself.

I afterwards found that the lady's best clothes were not come home, and nothing could prevail on her to be seen by her lordly brother without her silver gown. At length, on her father's producing her mother's jewels, which were in about as good a taste and as bright as the Copper Captain's, she began to array herself. George, in Sir Geoffrey's absence, had made his *entreé*, to assure me that my condescension had charmed the old Baronet, and I had quite cut him out.

Sir Geoffrey, at length, led in the bride. The *tout-ensemble* of a lady's dress I can form a tolerable judgement of, but the particulars are always far beyond my powers of decription. Mrs. Clifford's surpassed any thing I had ever seen, for ab-

surdity. When she had got over her confusion sufficiently to survey me from head to foot, she was, I am persuaded, astonished to find me a pleasant, civilised being, not above half a head taller than herself. I could not forbear casting a rueful look at George, after I had examined his choice. He stooped, and whispered me with a smiling *dégagé* air, as if saying something complimentary of her: "She has five thousand a-year!—were you the happier for marrying from love?" I was answered.

At dinner, the bride got on more easy terms with me, and found her tongue. She has a country kind of wit. Her common-place repartees delighted her father, who heartened her with—"Well said, Becky! Why, matrimony has improved thy wit, my girl!" On my word I believe that he loves his daughter as well as his housekeeper. I, however, am the pride and joy of his heart. "Ah! if Becky had married *you*, indeed!" said he, when we parted last.

I soon found that George was working hard to persuade his father-in-law of the propriety of his getting into parliament; and just at that juncture a seat was to be obtained at no greater price than superceding honest Santlow, who has always well merited the confidence of his country. Sir Geoffrey however, who now first tried his borough interest, pursued the point and carried it. 'Squire Clifford was chaired, the ball given, and the bride introduced with *éclat*. To the great delight of Sir Geoffrey I opened the ball with his daughter; while he sat peeping at us both through his spectacles, and informing all by-standers that his Becky had the handsomest foot and leg in that county, or the next to it. The *honourable* Mrs. Clifford (who will not abate a tittle of her dignity, and has turned away several of her tradesmen for not thus inscribing her bills) thought proper to call for the Trumpet minuet; while she scampered away at such a devil of a rate, that our performance could only be guessed at

by the tune. After it was over, however, she received with great complacency the ready-made compliments of the obsequious Squires. I recollected the old lines—

"Hail, charming power of self-opinion!
Since none are slaves in thy dominion.
Secure in thee, the mind 's at ease:
The vain have only one to please."

On my conscience, Frank, when I peruse this epistle I cannot confine vanity to my honourable sister, since I must have at least an equal portion of it, or I should not send you such a budget of scandal. Do not show it to your wife, lest she should say that we encroach on a female privilege.

Your advice is prudent; and as it does not much interfere with the plans of a lazy fellow like myself, I shall take it. That calculation made of the timber cannot be equitable. Send your surveyor down as soon as you can, and I will meet him.

Assure Mrs. Trevilian that I shall

venture to answer for the sins of your urchin, even with so many of my own on my head. Lady Diana wishes she may act by proxy, you say. She's a simpleton. A christening naturally opens the heart to matrimony; and unless she takes me in some foolish fit, I shall be half-inclined to marry her by proxy.—But, how dare I jest thus with an angel?

I have a proud and saucy heart, which delights in deceiving all common observers; and seldom is it that I am well pleased enough with my company to give them that power of judging which you always possess.

Adieu!

LETTER CXIV.

TO FRANCIS TREVILIAN, ESQ.

Percy Vale.

CONFOUND your prudent calculations, and my own too! Would I had let my steward sell every venerable oak for a sapling, before I had felt a twinge which recollection renews! or stood in the trying and awkward predicament I now do! Twice have I called for my horses, and resolved on flight: but pride, obstinate pride, insists upon my stay; commands me to meet her with a dauntless eye, and repay with silent contempt the injuries she has done me. But is it in nature to triumph over a dying woman? one whose languid eyes seem ready to close for ever, and yet, even now, retain that melancholy softness, (nameless beauty!) which charms, fixes, fills the whole soul?

I will, however, expose her arts; those arts which, ever successful, delude her friends at this moment as they once did her lover; and make her, after all her sins, admired, attended, worshipped as a suffering angel. I have a right to compel her, in turn, to feel—and feel she shall; yes; she shall find, though late, that I know her, and dread lest I should discover her past ill conduct to the adoring circle in which I find her.

I write as though you had partaken my rambles, while you know not even of whom I speak: and yet you must; for who has ever disordered my intellects, irritated my feelings, unknit every nerve of my frame, but Cecilia, faithless, ungrateful, beloved Cecilia!

Trevilian, I have always deceived even you. Ashamed to acknowledge that I was still the wretch of such a wretch, I laboured to attach myself to Lady Diana; and not finding it possible to think of woman and forget Cecilia, I scampered about, to lose in agitation and motion

painful, painful recollection! In public I talked, sung, laughed, and trifled, like other men; but every hour of loneliness restored to my heart its pains, its wants, its deep incurable sense of disappointment. I found within a chilled, immeasurable void, which nothing could contract, nothing could fill. Enraged, at intervals, to feel this, I cursed her, myself, the whole world. But why repeat, why dully enumerate, my frantic starts of rage, despair, disdain, and injury! Yet did I master myself so far as neither to name nor seek her. Alas! unnamed, unsought, has she come upon me, and I feel her power in every throbbing vein!

The surveyor is not yet arrived; and my house here so out of repair, and miserably furnished with tattered remnants of ancient splendor, that I could not find a comfortable chamber in it, or a good inn within reach. The galleries, doors, chimneys, windows, with a thousand apertures besides, gave such free passage to the wind last night, that I could not sleep

for its howling, and rose this morning before the sun. The benign and dewy sweetness of the air led me to walk over the estate. Solitude, and the beauty of the scene, insensibly calmed my mind. I found a thousand hitherto unknown charms in this romantic country, and saw how mad the project had been of parting with a portion of land which nature had so highly enriched with all her variety, and of which, certainly, a most inadequate valuation had been made. I lost myself in reflexions on the time when this place was the well-peopled residence of a bold and haughty baron, who, delighting to make his vassals happy, never contended but with his king. How changed were now the manners! The poor were crushed to the dust, the monarch on the contrary worshipped. That luxury which improves our comforts corrupts our morals; and hard indeed is it to restrict those imaginary wants which a wise man never allows himself to know. I was transformed almost into a mere country

gentleman, without one distinction but humanity, one pleasure but benevolence, when I started with disgust on hearing a pack of hounds in full cry very near me. Presently after I saw their owner approach, who dismounted to examine with his groom some hurt which his horse had got in the foot. The familiar address of —"Zounds, my Lord! is it you? Have you forsaken St. James's to pay your orisons to the rising sun in our part of the world?" made me recognise Sir George Harington; who readily accompanied me home to breakfast, and, by the hearty one he made, showed me the advantage of riding twelve miles before you see it. I soon understood that he had not thought himself too old to venture on another young wife, was grown a sober fellow, and almost lived on his estate in this neighbourhood. He was eloquent on the subject of matrimony, and, I soon found, thought his bride a nonpareil. I laughed at a delusion so natural, and treated the subject sarcastically. He in-

sisted that he should witness my conversion, if I would but accompany him to see a living angel and a dying one. Having nothing else to do, I agreed to dine with him, and inquired no further as to his two angels. I asked his advice concerning the disposal of my estate, on which we rode about all the morning; and when we approached his house, the park-keeper told him that his lady was not at home. Without one word of inquiry he turned his horse, and invited me to follow him. The road was cut with such taste through a wood, that I thought only of the varying scenery till we reached a green gate, where we dismounted. A few moments brought us to a kind of Italian villa, singularly constructed. There was I know not what of elegance, simplicity, and romantic beauty in the whole, that fixed my attention. Passing through a shady study into a shrubbery behind the house, I saw three ladies walking, one of whom leaned on the two others. That one, on our approach, stopped, clasped her hands, and

without turning her head dropped it on the shoulder of her friend. We hastened to offer assistance; but hardly had I the strength to give it, when I cast my eyes upon Cecilia, my own adored Cecilia, wan, speechless, sinking to the earth, but not insensible. A convulsive emotion ran over her features, and her eyes riveted themselves on mine with a heavy sadness incident to death. How powerful are the habits of decorum! Even at a moment like this the hypocrisy of politeness prevailed over all my awakened feelings, and I showed her only the same attention that Harington did. Yes; I saw this worshipped of my soul in a manner expiring, and shared not her direful struggle. It was some time before she could utter a syllable; but laying her hand on her heart, and gasping violently, she seemed to imply that her complaint was constitutional. Could I survey that beautiful ruin of the fairest form which nature ever wrought, ready to drop into dust at every breath of air that blew, and remember

her errors? Ah! even in death the graces of Cecilia were only wasted to a delicacy yet more exquisite!.....That voice, now so low, so musically low, and saddening!..... Oh, woman! powerful woman! what may you not do with us, when one moment of sorrow and of suffering obliterated from my mind all its deep, its eternally vowed resentments! I now recollected, in one of her companions, her lovely but insipid sister; and had no need of introduction to discern, in the animated character of the third lady, the beloved of Harington.

Recovered enough, at length, to speak, Cecilia thanked me for my attention with the frigid air of a perfect stranger; and Miss Rivers making me a cold and distant courtesy, I remained piqued to the soul. Lady Harington, alone eager to please and to show that she was herself pleased, by the sweetness of her manners justified her husband's panegyrics. I understood that the fair trio were all to dine at Percy Vale; and adjourned with Sir George to

rectify our dresses, and leave the ladies time to change theirs.

Some business still engrosses Harington; who, finding that I wished to write, has left me in his study. I write, yet scarce can I see the paper; for full before me stands that elegant habitation where dwells my—no, not my Cecilia, Colonel Percival's Cecilia. If ever my ears become reconciled to that sound, they must have long been used to discord.

I even thought that resentment marked her air, no less than disgust and coldness: yet her eyes pursued my steps. I turned at the last, and still those dear, those melancholy eyes were fixed on me. Perhaps her heart labours with some humiliating confession: my pardon, my pity, may yet be essential to her. Too surely all that relates to her will ever be interesting to me. I could almost resolve to fly back—hear her, indulge my soul with listening to that touching voice, pour forth all my own complaints, and relieve myself from the treasured load of

bitterness and reproaches! She only who caused my disappointment can guess at its excess: her tears, her sympathy, would yet assuage my anguish of heart.—Though another is born for my wife, I would yet live on terms of friendship with Cecilia. The idea of restored confidence awakens me to a new being: the torpor of inanity is past—To-morrow shall explain all.

* * * * * * *

To-morrow! said I? Alas! this day has done its cruel work, and left me the wretch of the creation. Yesterday I was comparatively happy, in the persuasion that I was the person injured. I regard myself at this moment with horror; for, oh! I find, too late, that I have unconsciously been the murderer of her so long, so ardently beloved. She gave me her whole heart—frankly, tenderly, fondly she gave it to me—and I broke it. The misery is complete;—it is irretrievable: and to stigmatise me, even to myself, with the same unalterable sweetness, the

same generous tenderness, she would forgive, she would console me! Cecilia! my angel Cecilia! where shall I find consolation when thou art vanished from me? when I seek in vain those pure, those expressive eyes, which drop the dews of heaven upon my failings? Yet quivering under this severe dispensation of Providence, I own its justice in depriving me of her. It has made my offence my scourge; and surely so keen a one, that my sufferings may expiate my sin.

Lady Harington's entrance obliged me to break off my letter: the study-doors opened to a saloon, whither she conducted me. Cecilia was sitting on a sofa, with that dignified grace so peculiarly her own; and, as if by agreement, each of us showed towards the other only a cold complaisance: yet I could not but be struck with her nobly candid countenance, her equal unstudied manners. If art, thought I, can produce an effect like this, thou mayst yet set the world in arms.

Sir George requested that his lady would play to me; which she did in a capital manner. He then entreated my Cecilia, for never can I give her the odious name which she has taken, to succeed her. After a little entreaty and irresolution, she sat down, and, saying that she did not want a book, sang from some old poet (Catherine Phillips, I think) these lines:

'Tis true, our life is but a long disease,
Made up of real pain and seeming ease.
Ye stars, who these entangl'd fortunes give,
Tell me, oh! tell me why
It is so hard to die,
Yet such a task to live?

If with some pleasure we our griefs array,
It costs us dearer than we can repay;
For Time or Fortune all things so devours,
Our hopes are crost,
Or else the object lost
Ere yet we call it ours!

Words so singularly applicable might alone have affected a heart impressed like mine: but the simple melody of the air;—that voice, which I once knew to

have been almost unlimited, now modulated to so low, so poignant a sweetness;—the heart that gave such an expression to the whole;—a form so elegantly fragile;—and eyes at which her very soul seemed issuing in a flood of radiance as they were occasionally raised towards heaven,—gave the solemnity of death, innocence, and truth, to every accent she uttered. I felt an agonising softness and blended shame, that tempted me to publish all I knew—demand all that I did not know; and, clasping her to my bosom, hold her there till the last breath escaped from either hers or my own.

A strange chill had by this time seized the whole company, and a dinner which we only tasted was soon removed. As the ladies seemed impatient to follow it, Harington and I spun out the dull hour of their absence between politics and agriculture. One strange tale circulating in the world I learned from declaring that I had changed my mind and would

not sell my estate here, which he seemed inclined to purchase,—that it was generally believed I could not avoid it: in short, in his phrase, that I was done up.

Tea at length was announced, and we returned to the saloon. Cecilia had retreated to a bow-window, where she stood in deep conversation with Lady Harington: her sister was carelessly playing on the organ. I saw the charming eyes of my love yet full of tears, though she fixed them on the garden; and I found it convenient to take a survey of the pictures, to hide the effect these powerful tears could not but have on my heart. Disjointed ideas form wretched conversations; and a constraint which politeness could not conquer, nor pride disguise in either, increased every moment. Each swelled with the consciousness of at least supposed innocence, and received that as an insult from the other. I, however, had it at my choice to make my exit, and accordingly ordered my phaeton. But Cecilia, after a pause which

had seemed necessary to enable her to speak at all, having cast her eyes in a collected manner around, fixed them on Sir George's lady:

"A situation so peculiar, perhaps unprecedented, as mine," said she in a faltering voice, "justifies some singularity of conduct; and as I may never again meet Lord Westbury, at least in this world, I at this trying moment feel it due to my own character to demand an explanation of some parts of his conduct, and to account for some parts of my own. Sir George and Lady Harington—to whose kindness I owe the estimation I hold in this world, the little acceptation I have in it, the little, the very little comfort that remains to me—may well be astonished that, till this hour, they never heard your name, my Lord, from my lips, nor knew the leading secret of my life."

"Spare yourself and your friends the pain of this agitation, dear Madam," said Sir George. "Can we know you,

and have a doubt of your propriety of conduct in all instances?"

"If, Sir George, you will not permit me to owe this *éclaircissement* to my friends, allow me to owe it to myself. It is, indeed, too commonly the fate of the obscure to be silent; to bury in their hearts the miseries they sink under; and to be reduced to annihilation in this world. I thought that I could have borne to the grave the secret of my soul; but I knew not, familiar as I had been with every other kind of calamity, the bitterness of unmerited contempt. Although that moment cannot be distant when doubt will be lost in certainty, yet would it sooth the painful interval, could I learn that Lord Westbury had some motive for his cruel coldness to one whose only fault was in his favour. Do not imagine, my Lord, that I address myself to your feelings: my demand is upon your honour only—upon that integrity which is, or ought to be, inseparable from your title to distinction. My transitory views have

long, long since vanished into air. One stroke," added she, bursting into a passion of tears, "went through my very heart; but time, reflexion, and religion, have allayed the anguish even of that.—I have been wanting to myself, my friend, in not preventing your imagination from aggravating my fault, by first confessing it. Yes; I will frankly own that I was culpable enough to allow an unfortunate partiality to seize on my soul, when Lord Westbury's union with another ought to have restrained me; but I dare leave it to himself to inform you, whether the weakness of my heart extended to my conduct."

The impression this singular kind of candour made upon me is inexpressible. Every word, to use an interesting phrase of her own, "went through my very heart." With eyes fixed upon the carpet, I appeared a self-convicted criminal. Not a sentence did she utter, but seemed to take a reason from those which had hitherto decided my opinion. The

ardour of innocence was in her voice, and the clearness of sincerity in her eye. Yet how could I answer? Had my proofs been clear as the noon-day sun, was it possible for me to throw a reflexion on a woman? With a voluntary equivocation I at length hesitated—

"Those to whom your merits, Madam, are so well known cannot need my testimony; but I am willing to declare to the whole world, should you suppose it necessary, that I thought you the most chaste of women."

"Thought!" cried she indignantly, redoubling her tears: "barbarous duplicity! Ah, Lord Westbury! you brought that to a proof. Thus far, however, I have no right to complain. One more question I will venture; and remember, that I expect you to answer me as truly as you must Him with whom dissimulation is vain."

I arose piqued. "My honour, Madam, has perhaps been as well tried as your virtue. I can lay my hand on my

heart, nor feel it give one conscious throb."

"I am willing to think that candour an obligation, my Lord, which I might perhaps consider only as a right. May I, then, at last know why you have selected me as the helpless object of a scorn which you would not show to any other of my sex?"

"Pardon me, Madam, if I do not answer a question which I never expected to hear."

Starting up disordered, she repeated in a broken inward tone—"I hoped to have been proof against every thing in this life; but a silence so cutting adds a deeper thorn to those which you long since planted here!"—pressing her white hands passionately on her still whiter bosom. "Leave me, Lord Westbury! I now ask nothing more of you. Leave me, while I yet can die in charity with God and man. Your sight," continued she, closing her eyes indignantly, "is painful, it

is even torturing, to her whom you so coolly condemn."

"It shall never more, Madam, offend you: but pardon me if I add, that you owe the justice you claim. The esteem of this company is not indifferent to me; nor would I incur the censure of inhumanity."

"Leave me, my Lord!—Lady Harington, let me go!"—struggling to disengage herself, with an agitation of manner and countenance almost amounting to phrensy. "Your silence, Lord Westbury, has destroyed my character, and your words my peace. I find that I am not to owe even a vindication to him who alone exposed me to censure: let me, then, be indebted to the kindness of my friends for their esteem. A little, a very little time will give a full, a final conviction to you all. My heart, already broken, cannot endure a trial like this.—Farewell, Lord Westbury—farewell for ever! I cannot be harsh, unkind, un-

generous:—preserve the heart you have last won from the agonies I suffer: render the life of Lady Diana happier and longer than you will allow mine to be."

"Stay, Madam," cried I, warmed and provoked in my turn; "you leave me in too painful a predicament: and, since it must be so, I *will* answer your question. You asked me why I treated you with a scorn that I would not show to any other of your sex. I reply, Because I loved you beyond the whole of it."

"Oh, heavens! You tyrannised, you insulted me, then, only from knowing your power!"

"Had my tenderness met the return it merited, you would have borne my name, or your father's only."

"To what a singular fate am I born!" cried she, sinking into her seat. "You reproach me, then, with a resolution which you, and you only, obliged me to take? Well you are aware that my heart could have no share in the no-

minal union; and my candour, for what I now declare to his relations was fully known to Colonel Percival, secured me the esteem of him whom I married. He suggested this as the only way of assuring to me an independence to—die on. How could it," added she, covered with a soft carnation glow, and fixing her eyes reproachfully on me, "how could it have any other consequence? But did not you force me to accept his proposal? did you not write?—add ingratitude to falsehood, and renounce your vows with a barbarous coldness? Did you not—for why should I seek to conceal or lessen the mortification—refuse me?"

"That letter, Madam, was extorted by your own. Spare me the bitter recollection of them both."

"Every moment seems to add to the mystery which I vainly expect it will clear. Do me the favour, my Lord, to relate the light in which all my actions have appeared to you since I left your house. If as for your own sake rather

than mine I would hope, your reserve proceeds from a mistaken sense of honour in any instance which regards me, think more justly. Conscious of innocence, I cannot suffer from even a rigid scrutiny into my conduct; for my love," added she, "has been through life my chief fault. Alas! it has likewise been my greatest misfortune!"

"You urge me to an indecorum which I know not how to reconcile to my sense of honour: yet remember, that it is at your reiterated request I speak. I will begin with our meeting in the court, where my protection delivered you. What was the concealed part of that adventure? You even then dared not trust me with it."

She started up, and answered me with a look. Indignation flashed through the tears yet flowing, and a bright glow enriched her pale complexion.

"Good heaven!" cried she, raising her eyes from me to that, "is this, then, the

mighty crime which costs me my life! Misjudging Lord Westbury! what will you say when you *do* know the whole of that adventure? when I tell you that your brother was the author of the insult, and my apprehension for your safety the cause of the concealment? I dare appeal even to Mr. Clifford himself."

"You appeal, then, to a villain, Madam: it was he who first insinuated the suspicion into my mind. Oh, Cecilia! I fear, I fear I have in all instances been alike mistaken. Rest here, then, all inquiry, and in one dear embrace be the past forgotten!".

"No, my Lord!" cried she, receding with a dignified firmness: "the hour is gone by—the tie is broken! Broken? was it ever knit, if such a fault could break it? Your own knowledge of my conduct might have counterbalanced a hundred such little concealments."

"I do not tell you that this was the only or the most doubtful error I could

mention. Think of your conduct in France! Could all Paris mistake, like myself, respecting your flight?"

"I do not know what you mean by my *flight*, my Lord; nor how a creature so unknown and insignificant came to be spoken of at all in Paris. I left it, gladly, in Lady Killarney's carriage and escorted by her servants. I left it on the morning following that memorable one, when I found you in her dressing-room. Lady Harington knows the day well, for she was on the road with me, and will witness that when I passed and repassed herself and mother I was alone; till in the packet we commenced that friendship which can end but with our lives."

"If this be true, why did you travel alone? Why should you fly from him who had hastened to seek you—only you? unmoved by my letters, unaffected by my tenderness—I will venture to say my generosity!"

"Ah! why was I not unaffected by all your actions! To debase yourself by

an attachment to Lady Killarney would at any time enough have shocked me; but to insult me with the sight of it—to pursue a loose amour in the very house which I inhabited!"

"There my doubts return again. How came you in her house? I must own that it was the last I ever thought to meet you in."

"Gracious heaven!" cried she, "what does all this mean? Did not Amelia tell you that I went abroad with that vile woman, by Mrs. Granville's recommendation? That lady knew no more than myself of the lightness of her conduct; and when at last I was shocked by the discovery, I became, by my own choice, a prisoner, till the unlucky day when I met you. The following one, I easily obtained Lady Killarney's consent to my departure."

"What say you?—you lived in her house? This is altogether a most inexplicable mystery. You boarded, as Mrs. Forrester told me, at the convent St. ——:

it was there that I sent, nay personally delivered, letters for you. You returned me word, by a Miss Eliza, that you were ill, very ill, not able to see me. To her, at your own desire expressed in a note, I gave Mrs. Forrester's packet. In short, who could it be, that, assuming your name, ran away with the Marquis de Louvigny? and what could induce the prioress herself to confirm this strange fabrication with her own lips to me?"

So deadly a paleness seized her now, that I feared I had, though at her own desire, brought particulars to light which she wished for ever buried in oblivion; and I pierced her more deeply by aggravating apologies. Lady Harington gave her drops; for her eyes now seemed closing in death, and now were fixed immoveably upon me. Long gaspings at length restored her speech: it was determinate, though feeble.

"I see, I see it all!" cried she: "the black veil of sin and malice at length is rent:—a base, inhuman woman has

undone me! She was even fortunate enough to find an associate like herself, and a nature to act upon which was credulous even to a folly. I upbraid you no longer, my Lord: live at peace with your own heart—you are amply acquitted. I even feel more for you than myself. You will, perhaps, have long to brood over this discovery, while me it only kills."

"Oh, heavens, my love! what say you? How, how shall I conciliate you, if this be an insufficient atonement?"—I sank at her feet.

Her agitation recovered by more alarming me. She clasped my hands in hers, and, fondly raising them to her lips, impressed on them a cold convulsive kiss. I wept, I groaned—I knew not what I did.

"Oh, this is too much!" at length cried she. "Human strength cannot support an *éclaircissement* like this. Could I have thought that such a possibility existed, the silence which I have hitherto

preserved, I would have sacrified my life to maintain. Far indeed, Lord Westbury, be it from me, who have so long wished to know you happy, to make you otherwise. I submitted to suffer in your opinion while you were absent; but could I *see* you despise me? That abandoned woman, to whom Heaven in its wrath delivered you and directed me, foresaw all this. Alas, my Lord! there was in the convent, where I did awhile reside, another Miss Rivers—Miss Eliza Rivers, the friend of Lady Killarney. She, as the only inmate of that name when you arrived, obtained the letter meant for me: from that, she comprehended enough to receive your visit without danger of detection; and from yourself, enough to carry on the delusion. Oh! why did I not suspect that my ruin must be the basis of such a friendship! I can now call to mind how carefully Lady Killarney kept me in my own apartment, till the unlucky moment when I emerged and

found you in hers! The worthless girl who bore the same name with me, was the natural daughter of Lady Leyburne, and seems destined to perpetuate the disgrace to which she owed her being. She, for I witnessed some marks of mutual partiality, doubtless eloped with the Marquis Louvigny, and completed the plot. The prioress was a lady incapable of deceiving you: she was herself deceived; and, having heard of your visiting only Miss Eliza, could not even guess that you knew me. A disgrace which so much affected, engrossed her; and the Miss Rivers who had so recently eloped from her house, was the only one whom she was likely to imagine you inquired for. But it could not be Lady Killarney—it could not be Miss Eliza Rivers—it could not be the prioress—ah, no: it was Heaven itself that took you from me! I was not perhaps worthy of the felicity you meant to bless me with, and it has thus shortened all my griefs—my repin-

ings! I forgive you the too easy belief. Oh, Lord Westbury! do not thus shock, terrify, afflict me!"

Never, surely, did misery exceed mine, during this clear decisive recital.

"Oh! you," groaned I out at last; "whom in guilt, perfidy, ignominy (as I thought), I still loved—forgive me! Whence came you so perfect, but to destroy my peace! Had you been passionate, had you been weak, long since must we have known the motives that separately influenced us! Now, how can I supplicate your pardon? how can I even accept it? Spurn me as a jealous ideot—a weak rash wretch!—any thing but a voluntary villain, and I will own the title. Yet, oh, Cecilia! to a fond, an eager heart, is not credulity natural? I ask nothing from your justice; I throw myself upon your mercy—your mercy only!"

"Rise, Lord Westbury, and give me a hearing—a full and candid hearing! You address a heart more willing to believe than you can be to assert your

honourable intention; whose worst affliction was to be obliged to conclude you unworthy its regard. That delusion once dissipated, I think that I can struggle with its other feelings. Restored by this explanation to all worth a wish—my esteem, my tender esteem—you may fulfil the obligations formed under the misconception. My views on earth are finally accomplished; and death, not marriage, must henceforward employ my thoughts."

"Not marriage, Cecilia?"

"This declaration is induced by reason only, my Lord. Why should I wish to form a tie which must make me look to the approaching termination of my fate with horror? To you I feel indebted for my present fortitude: would you seek, then, to destroy it?"

"This you would call cruel, did you feel, did you participate my anguish."

"I could not mean it so; but indeed, my Lord, I do not intend to be entreated out of a rational, a just resolution. Ever

beneath you in every advantage, can I consent to bring to you only the miserable remnant of those which I once possessed?"

"Are you not Cecilia still? my own Cecilia? the idol of a fond and faithful heart? Oh, speak without distracting me!—guess, guess the horrors of my despair, should you yet refuse me!"

"I once before, my Lord, saw you at my feet, when it was a torture beyond even this to refuse you: yet had I courage to act up to my duty;—and now to fail!"—

"Cecilia!" cried I, "my generous, my cruel Cecilia! why did you not allow me to continue in happy ignorance of my own guilt?—for then should I have had only the common evils of life to contend with."

"Ah! is it true, then," cried she with eager softness, "that you have impaired your fortune?"

I saw her error—oh, happy was the moment when that report arose!—and as-

sented, as the only way to act upon her liberal nature. A silent but violent struggle ensued between her pride and generosity. Rising at length,

"Oh, Lord Westbury!" cried she, "how dear, how fatally dear are you to me!—you, who were born only to overcome my best resolutions! Your prosperous state I could have witnessed without pain, without envy; but have you a sorrow which I am not destined to share?"

Trevilian, you should have seen the benign, the celestial air with which she uttered these affecting words, while she extended to me that hand which now once more became the sum of all my wishes!

"How blest would this generosity make me," cried I, "had I the power of restoring you!"

"Am I for ever to be refused, my Lord?" said she, divinely smiling through the tears which love and pleasure had drawn forth: "How can you want the

power to make me happy, while you have the will!"

An embrace, given and returned with equal ecstacy, seemed to bury in oblivion every real, every fancied injury; and restored once more to my heart its only object, to Cecilia's its sole wish! We relapsed into childhood: again we looked, sighed, embraced—again were lost in delight and silence!

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This *dénouement* will astonish you; yet see, feel, judge my situation, and say whether I could have acted otherwise. Recollect what was due to my first choice—the wedded of my heart—no less than to Lady Diana. A thousand motives would have induced me to deliberate; but the delicate mind of the woman before me required that I should instantly resolve. Well I knew how she would have been wounded at the least irresolution, the smallest deficiency of feeling!

Perhaps you will imagine that I might have acceded to her proposal, and left

her to languish out the remainder of those days which I had shortened, in loneliness and obscurity. A few months more, and of Cecilia nothing would remain! Could I meanly have sheltered myself behind my rank and my engagements, no one would ever have been persuaded that I meant to marry her, or would have censured me for making another choice as much better as the lady was richer; for such is the usual computation of merit. No being would have called me to account for acting thus, but my own heart; yet, perhaps, I could sooner have answered to the whole world. The more I have it in my power to become a villain, the less it is in my nature: and had I known myself the innocent means of shortening the days of the charming creature who would have sacrificed her life to prolong mine, what rank, wealth, beauty, or merit, could have reconciled me to my own conscience?

In receding from the conditional engagements made with Lord Winchester,

I awaken the pride of his daughter to contend with her partiality; am exposed to his resentment; encounter a general censure. Lady Diana herself, justly sensible of her own rank and value, will disdain the man who saw in another the object of preference. These advantages will lift her high in the eyes of the world, and in her own: she has still the power either of choosing or of living single. Lady Diana is rational; she will feel that those motives must have been prevailing indeed, which could make me encounter so many disagreeables. Had I, by one artifice, nay even by studious attention, won her heart, the case would be different; but that heart, invaluable as it is, was a voluntary gift; and, to her, priority of claim, unconquerable feeling, and the painful explanation, would fully exculpate me.

Thus, not only love, but reason, justice, and the invariable sense of right, decided my conduct towards my Cecilia. From these motives she gained the pre-eminence

which merit and passion alone would have secured to her. Yet, justly punished with this delicate embarrassment, for a weakness and credulity which I can never pardon in myself, I found, that, however happy my choice might prove, I must always have something to regret.

We voluntarily undermine our own peace, and then complain that it is destroyed. Had I never known or never been led into error by that fiend, Lady Killarney, how happy might I have long since been with this glorious creature! Now, sorrow and humiliation blend with pleasure and tenderness whenever I cast my eye on my love, and rack me with a smothered agony. What but a miracle can lengthen her life! Oh, that abandoned woman, and my infatuated self!—Yet why do I stamp her with a guilt so pre-eminent? Envy of Cecilia, and a desire of revenging herself on me, supply her with some motives of action, though they cannot justify her conduct: it is from the hand of my brother that I have

been most wounded—that very brother who has shared my fortune, lived in my confidence, bowed before Cecilia! How refined, remote, ingenious, were his artifices!—for him, nothing could exceed my resentment, but my contempt. In the tie of relationship he is saved from my vengeance, but I shall ever treat him as my enemy. I despise him too much even to explain myself; but he will know my whole opinion when he sees the name of my bride.

Lord Winchester and Lady Diana cling indeed to me; and I could almost fancy that you and my other friends had precipitated my engagements. It is true, those engagements could be only conditional: but the proud old fool never would see them in a proper light. I must, however, now act with decision, and Cecilia is my wife, whatever consequence may follow.

I have dispatched an express to the archbishop for a chaplain and special license; after which, the day and hour

rests with my beloved. Apologise in any way you think best to your lady, and let some friend stand sponsor in my place: it is impossible that I should attend in person. Cecilia is gone home to compose herself: I will endeavour to do the same. A long farewell now to retrospection! henceforward we must both live for the future.

LETTER CXV.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Orange Hill.

ESCAPED once more from every one, even from my own fond fluctuating heart, let me in solitude unbosom myself to my Amelia, and, with her, form a resolution that shall consist with my character, and conduce to my peace. Alas, my dear! neither surprise, anger, grief, nor joy, can break the human heart; for I have seen Lord Westbury, and yet live to tell you so. Overwhelmed with the

contrariety of emotions which I have felt for many hours, I know not even now which most prevails. Rapture flows with my tears, and tears stream through my rapture. How well did you judge! and what an idiot was I! His honour, his heart is unimpeached; and in that recollection I lose all trace of my sufferings. Have I ever been slighted?—have I ever shed in silence and loneliness the bitter drops of agony? Alas! did not my feeble trembling frame, my painful gaspings, prove too plainly that all this *has* been, I should think the whole an illusion, since he is once more devoted to me. I seem all spirit, as I long have all body; as if a wish, a thought, would enable me to float through that pure æther, now more glorious than ever; as if all the languages incident to mortality were too weak, too poor, too common for me. Oh, joy! most dear and transient of all emotions, thou comest like light in a dream to a blind man, who wakes himself into darkness by the

excess of his admiration! Even so do I feel, in one moment, that Lord Westbury must not, cannot now become mine. Why had I not courage to forbear an explanation which has poisoned the peace of his days, and cannot lengthen the few that remain to me! How could I be so selfish! I have sacrificed to my pride his future happiness—that happiness which was more dear to me than life! Ah! had I known that he had been like me deceived!—Perhaps even then I might not have been able to be silent. Mutually destructive to each other, we give and take, by turns, the unsought-for power of afflicting.

Sir George, it seems, met Lord Westbury on the estate which I told you he had purposed to sell; and, wholly uninformed that he was even personally of my acquaintance, brought him hither, to present his lady to her agreeable neighbour. The sound of a voice so well known, so dear to my soul, reached it before I beheld him, and plunged me into that ec-

static delirium which, seeming to blend every softness nature is capable of, carries sensation almost beyond enjoyment. I neither saw nor heard distinctly for some time.

What a child was I to suppose, that the heart which has once found an object can ever relinquish it! Every passion beside love is destructive of the rest:—pride, revenge, ambition, reign but by turns. Love alone, powerful love, combines the contrarieties, and gathers strength from all. If, exhausted by eternal conflicts, it sinks into inertitude, it is only to collect power again to be exhausted.

How could I ever believe that Lord Westbury meant to wrong, insult, desert me! Alas! the wretch of supposed ingratitude, he, too, has suffered—he, too, has wept! Oh, what crime would not those tears atone! My heart is embalmed in them. In an agony beyond expression, when every thing was forgotten but himself, I renewed the promise made only to him; and how can I re-

tract? Yet too surely I ought to withdraw it. Every moment of his absence confirms that resolution which his presence entirely destroys. Alas! there is an apprehensiveness in the unhappy, which, including all possibilities, doubles every real mortification by a thousand imaginary ones. I am no longer a mere dependent: Lord Westbury has, they say, ruined himself. Oh, never let him fancy that he has lost a merit in my eyes by losing a fortune! Sick and worn out as I am, I cannot hope to rest till I have found words which may convey something like my feelings to him.

" TO THE EARL OF WESTBURY.

" I NO longer hesitate, my dear Lord, thus to address you: and passing at length that barrier by which I have been hitherto confined, I will frankly indulge the tenderness which neither time, sorrow, nor sickness, has been able to subdue. A feeling which springs only from that, now governs my pen. Yet hardly know I in

what terms to express my sentiments, and tremble at the mere idea of giving you pain. Perhaps by this preface I may only increase it, as the young surgeon does who tries over and over the instrument before he amputates the limb.

"In a moment of ungoverned affection you surprised me into consenting to be yours. Alas! I never can. Have I to own that the wound in my heart has mortified beyond the possibility of a cure; and the power of being happy, or making you so, is now lost to me! My weak emaciated state is sufficiently obvious. My temper, too, I fear is altered. I tremble lest your very solicitude should rather afflict than bless me now, by continually reminding me how much I have lost; and must not you at the same moment feel how little you have gained? It will not be in my power to forget that I have been wretched, nor in yours to declare yourself happy. This is cool deliberation, just reasoning. Consoled in finding that I owe my fate to error, and not

unkindness—that you may live in peace with your own soul, and mine may quit in your arms the feeble frame which yet contains it—I have conquered all human weakness, so far as to bound to this indulgence all my hopes in you.

"How delicate is your situation!—alas, how delicate, too, is my own! I have not been so uninterested or uninformed respecting your conduct, but that I know the claims of Lady Diana Selwyn on your honour, if not your heart. I heard, with a melancholy pleasure, that she was worthy your attachment; and conceive, by a just estimation of your merit, that you must be all to her. Ah, my Lord! do not convert her sensibility into her misfortune! Too deeply have I felt the pangs of disappointment, to wish her a fate so severe. Fulfil an engagement which it depends upon yourself to make happy; and be assured, that I have sufficiently subdued selfishness to be satisfied with this arrangement. You shall present me to the sweet creature: I will

win her regard, and pass the few days that remain to me in the society of both. I have weighed well every word I write; and this advice is dictated by honour, reason, and that nobler feeling which obliges us to consider the pains we inflict no less than those we suffer. Be just to Lady Diana, be just to yourself; and, in acting up to the rule of right, give all the happiness even you can now give to

"Your

"CECILIA."

"P. S. I cannot yet resolve to see you. .....Lady Diana knows well the little derangement of your fortune: hers can amply repair it; and her generous heart will only find an additional pleasure in having the power. Do not ascribe to your conduct the debilitated state of my health; since I can with truth assure you, that a vexation in which you had no share struck the blow under which my constitution sinks. Adieu! Reflect, de-

cide; and be all your decisions fortunate."

I dispatched this as soon as copied. I was not quite satisfied with the style; but a minute attention on such points requires a colder heart; and his might be offended by a well-turned period.

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On re-perusing my hasty letter, it appears to me a compound of faults. Why was I in such a hurry! Is it not the height of vanity in me to dictate to Lord Westbury? Why should I assume a right to influence his conduct, while I give him none over my own? Will Lady Diana accept a hand offered at the instance of her rival?—or can he make her happy, if, at that instance, he chooses her? Ah, what had I to do with an effort like this! I should have left Lord Westbury to judge for himself, in a situation so delicate. What haughty, dignified, weak, wavering creatures are we! I

am not able to pardon my heart the meanness of self-love, in giving advice which it does not wish him to follow. Why cannot it at once stoop to its follies, or rise to its flights!

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I have been obliged to send for advice. This want of breath is terrible: bleeding has a little relieved me.

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I really believe my head is turned: certainly my memory is impaired. I held out my hand to Joseph for a letter which I did not expect, and had expressly forbade him to bring. But I did not forbid him to deliver mine into Lord Westbury's own hands, and the poor lad had not observation enough to attempt that. I might, I find, have spared my injunction: my Lord had no thoughts of answering me; he never, as it appears, inquired for my messenger. So much the better: I would have him see the propriety of adopting my advice. Perhaps, indeed, my weak heart expected that he

should make some little merit of compliance. Alas! when at my feet, he might secretly hope for a denial. Yet even if so, may his every wish be crowned with equal success! may a wife as lovely as if she were poor, and as obedient as if she were ugly, call forth in his heart its latent domestic virtues, and render them a mutual blessing!

Adieu!

LETTER CXVI.

TO MY LITTLE MAD FRIEND, IF SHE HAVE ANY LUCID INTERVALS.

YOU, who know that I have not naturally the least taste for these high-flown fancies, must pardon me for thinking you a little touched in the brain. Here, after half-breaking your own heart, and not leaving me a single tear had I a mind to tease Sir George with a whimpering fit, you are resolved to make an end

of this charming fellow. What a catalogue of sins you will have to answer for! Among the rest, I shall lay to your charge the violent aversion Lord Westbury seems to have taken to me, for laughing heartily at your last night's generous, heroic epistle; as if he, or indeed any body else, could think you in earnest. Had I not consented to enclose his letter within mine this morning, I do not know how I should have regained his friendship; and was at no small loss to guess why he committed it to my charge, instead of sending it himself, till, observing that he was ready to knock the footman down who unwarily called you by my poor uncle's name, I found out that he could not resolve to inscribe the cover.

Would you have thought that I should reflect enough on this minute incident to lay my imperial commands on Sir George to inform him that you had so very, very little right to the name you bear, that all the proctors in the Commons would al-

low him to marry you as Cecilia Rivers still? Perhaps it may be fancy, but the man looks much more himself this morning after the news.

What a beautiful hand this Lord of yours (for so he will and so he must be) writes! Well, if I am able to send this unsealed epistle away unread—which piece of heroism I do not despair of achieving—I shall, in my own proper person, gain more credit to the sex than Madam Eve whilom deprived us of. Now do not fret at this stuff—every one in their way, my dear!

I long, methinks, for an act of grace, that all these mistakes may either be cleared up or forgotten. Marianne and I can make little entertainment out of them, and shake our empty noddles at each other, as sagely as if we had something in them.

My lord and master is closeted with yours—that is to be—about some sage matrimonial consultation: but if I do not wheedle the secret out of the former,

what did I marry an old man for? Now I think of it, that is but a bad kind of project. I will e'en fold up my features to a gravity as prim as your own when fools are loquacious; make ready a decent quantity of tears, with a proper stock of *ums* and *aks*, accompanied with a grand symphony of sighs and groans, and implore my Lord himself to tell me all. The person most interested, you know, adds to every recital a life and energy; and Lord Westbury's eyes, to give them only their due, illustrate every word he utters.

Let me see—I began with an intention of telling you two things:—one, I observe, I have related; the other is, that I could not close my eyes for his Lordship, who slept in the apartment close to ours, or rather did not sleep there, but paced about his room all night long. What say you to that?

'Pshaw! he teases me out of my life.—"What, have you not done yet, my good Lady?"—"No, my good Lord!" (This

is a little dialogue, with the door between us).....Oh, now I remember what I had further to tell you. You were hardly out of the house before the tall Misses arrived, with cousin Ned, whom they had met, and brought back by force: he waits your royal word, to stay or go. Repeal his sentence of banishment, at least for the present: I want him for fifty occasions. He will soon see how things go with you and my Lord; and then

> "Farewell to love and all its charms:
> I'll haste where glory calls!"

Do not abuse that scrap, lest it should be the product of my own head; since hardly another do I know that could produce any thing so dull.

I wait, as in ceremony bound, on my magnificent cousins; otherwise, assure yourself that I should besiege your fortress with Major-general Westbury; who, poor soul, is afraid of laying you up, if he appear before it unsupported by me.

Marianne bids me add, that, if you

choose her company, you need only say the word. In my opinion, you might choose better;—no offence to her pretty face.

"There it is, there it is!"—Bless us, he will not let me add another word. "Heaven send my mother played my father fair!"—for, somehow or other, this Lord Westbury and I must be relations—*(entre nous,* I wonder what sort of a woman *his* mother was!)—we are both such furious impatient souls.

I had a thousand other things of equal importance to say. If lovers ever condescend to eat, why cannot you come and dine with us? You shall see how the man who is to be your Lord, is treated by

SOPHIA HARINGTON.

LETTER CXVII.

LORD WESTBURY'S LETTER.

AFTER such a cold admonitory epistle, Madam, how shall I venture to address you?—how hope to prevail? Is it you—indeed you, who so cruelly bestow me on another!—you, whom I have loved with so fond a passion, so unabated an ardour! The very wrongs and insults which, it seems, outlive in your memory all other recollections, ought perhaps to give me a merit in your eyes, since they could only proceed from the delicacy, the excess of my tenderness. How gladly, even with life, would I atone for them!

You talk to me of engagements. Decided ones I could not make, filled as I knew my own heart to be with a passion stronger than reason, invincible even against contempt. Oh! you, whom I

have loved to weakness—phrensy!—you, whom I must ever love!—is it possible that you can abandon me to misery and vice! For how can you expect that I should insult a woman as amiable as yourself, though not so obdurate, with the chilling offer of my hand merely?

I meant, Cecilia, to write with composure and recollection, but my heart is interested—it will be heard. Ah! surely you owe me something for these bitter hours of self-accusation! You owe it to heaven to forgive me—to the heaven which acts upon me most powerfully through you! For what must I be, if you reject me?—a weak unstable being, who seeks to lose in daily dissipation the pangs of conscience and the want of happiness! Oh! yet, my love, take me to a heart enriched with all the virtues! Allow me to imbibe them, warmed and strengthened by your own example. Delay a little the perfection of your purity:

"Oh, want your heaven, till I have learnt the way!"

Can I think that you sincerely forgive me, if you withhold the only convincing proof—yourself? Why coldly offer me wishes for a felicity of which you at the same moment deprive me? If such be indeed your barbarous, your final determination, wherefore did your arms open to enclasp me? wherefore did you infuse into my soul the thousand half-forgotten wishes, the luxurious mixture of sorrow and of joy, which you, and you only, ever could infuse? You speak like a philosopher, yet call yourself a lover! You coldly represent to me, that you can never forget you have been wretched:—nay, then, you are no lover: for I recollected not that I had ever been so, when I only fancied passion to have resumed her empire, and that the tender crimson on your cheek was the effusion of a heart where I yet reigned. I demand, however, a right to convince you: yes, you shall one day render more justice to my invariable esteem, confidence, affection. I will be yours, Cecilia, though you still

refuse to be mine. I will quit the kingdom, if you should indeed prove inflexible; for no other woman shall bear the title which you refuse to dignify. My children—those children who were once so dear to you—for ever deprived of a mother's care, a mother's example, will then shoot up unobserved, and launch into the world by accident. As to my own fate, lost to the moral duties, the innocent pleasures of existence, severely will I punish in myself that fault which Cecilia cannot, on reflexion, pardon.

You acknowledge, then, that you have felt sorrows in which I had no share:—they were powerful enough to bow you thus early to the earth. I ought, perhaps, to congratulate myself on this avowal; but sure I am that I cannot. Rich or poor, happy or miserable, I would wish you to depend on me—on me only, for I would on Cecilia. Yet still I languish for the truth. Oh, tell me that at least, my love! Grant something to my

prayers, my sighs, my repentance, my despair!

How unjust, or rather falsely generous, are your arguments respecting Lady Diana! My apparent ingratitude may give her a temporary grief: but what would the coldness of a husband, who lived in the looks of another, give her? Can you advise me to attach the sweet creature to my fate through life by the most holy of ties, while conscious that you yourself possess my fondest affections? Would you tempt me to make another admirable woman wretched? You cannot judge her merit, because you cannot calculate your own. Lady Diana is not in any thing inferior to my Cecilia; and I owe her so much, that even to you I will do her justice. Ah! you will one day estimate her truly enough, to rejoice that she had not a fate so hard.

Remember, that not on Lady Diana Selwyn, but yourself, depends my happiness or misery. Think, then, yet again—

think long, think seriously, ere you finally decide the fate of your own

Devoted, but unfortunate,

WESTBURY.

LETTER CXVIII.

TO THE EARL OF WESTBURY.

BE virtuous, be happy, my Lord, if I indeed make your virtue and your happiness! You were born to be my fate, and I can no longer resist you. Ah! why should I hesitate to avow my heart to have been ever so wholly your own, that I would choose life or death, only as either might ultimately establish your felicity? There are many in the world to whom this declaration would appear a mere flight of fancy; yet are there others whose own feelings would tell them that such a passion may be found in souls purified by affliction, tried

by absence, and animated by hopes that extend beyond this sublunary sphere.

Ah! I perhaps wounded my own heart to persuade yours. If a sick and drooping wife be indeed your choice, can she who obtains that distinction any longer feel a sense of suffering?

Yet, believe me, I wrote not to try your sincerity, for of that I had no doubt, or to obtain a preference over the unfortunate Lady Diana: I must be conscious of deserving it, before such a preference would gratify me. Let me again obtrude my advice, though with more deference, and recommend to you that noble ingenuousness towards her which would have become my own consolation. Well, well I know, that the worst of mortal pangs, to a generous and impassioned heart, is to be obliged to suppose its choice unworthy of itself. Never was I mean or despicable enough to depreciate that lovely woman, even in idea. Ah, no: I respect, admire, lament her!

Tell her all, then, I beseech you!—tell

her that I am only worthy of you in my sufferings for your sake!—tell her that I shall hardly be able to enjoy a felicity of which I so innocently deprive her, and shall bewail her fate on the very bosom of happiness! But how strangely I forget myself whenever I address you! I well know this kind of sincerity to be impracticable. To-morrow, if I am better, you shall inform me how you mean to reconcile those frequent foes—Love and Honour. I feel this letter to be the utmost effort of my strength till then.

P. S. I could wish your visits here to be unknown to Lady Harington's guests, for reasons which you shall be told when we meet.

LETTER CXIX.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

CONGRATULATE me, my own Amelia! add the only joy wanting to complete mine, in your tender participation. Oh, you who have so often wept with me in my sorrows, weep with me now in my joys! I may, at last, relieve my heart of all its treasured softness. Ah no! custom alone serves to check my frankness, and "I dare not" is always the first sentence which occurs to me. At last, then, I live on terms of fondness and familiarity with Lord Westbury: at last may expect him without blushing, receive him without tremor. And now my pen first fails me. Sorrow is diffuse; but what power has language to paint those overflowings of joy which Heaven has ordained should be the perfection of silence!

When once it was agreed that I should

indeed become his wife, I ceased any longer to oppose his will. The day which best pleased him would best please me; and it would have been the next, had he not dispatched an express, the moment I wrote him my consent, to the archbishop, for a special license and his chaplain—a very unnecessary parade, since, after all, I am among the vulgar souls who think that we address God with most reverence at the foot of the altar; and there, alone, will I give my hand in wedlock.

To-morrow then, to all human appearance, will unite me for ever to Lord Westbury. To-morrow I shall resign all right to a name which I could hardly ever assume with propriety, and never signed but in the church register and lawyers' deeds. Ah! can this, indeed, be so! I am almost a sceptic with continual disappointment, and scarce dare rely on a transition in my fate as extraordinary as sudden. I send you his letter. The strength of his feelings, the justness of his arguments, conquered every scruple.

He demanded his peace at my hands, and it had been inhumanity to withhold it: nor can I persuade him to delay the marriage one hour in compliment to Lady Diana. Whether this haste really springs from his own impatience, or lest his pride should be hurt by its being said that he referred his decision to the Winchester family, or whether he thinks the final blow the least kind of suffering to the lovely Diana, I have not been able to discover: and my situation is too delicate for me to press upon those reserves which propriety alone can occasion. It is apparent to every one, as well as myself, that when I am in tolerable health his heart overflows with delight.

Although I could not prevail on him to wait your presence, hasten hither, my dearest Amelia! I am not well enough to venture a journey; and your tenderness, added to that of my Lord, may do much towards restoring a constitution equally exhausted with my heart, though not so easy to recover.

I have made it my particular request that the wedding may be kept a profound secret. My health, my mourning, all make its publication improper. To be frank, I have yet another reason no less cogent. Lady Harington has, in her usual thoughtless way, kept Captain Percival with her, as well as the Misses Frazier. Hardly reconciled yet to the idea of losing me for ever, it is too much, without any preparation, for Percival to behold me the bride of another. I may arrange all, however, my own way. "So we are but married I shall be happy," is always Lord Westbury's answer to any of my propositions.

Would you think that I should be able, after knowing him so long, to discover new charms in my love? and yet so it is. The peace of his heart illumines his countenance, and gives his manners a gay and playful turn, irresistibly engaging. Hitherto some constraint or other has always checked in us both that charm which familiarity throws over society in a more

extended sense. Did not my perpetual indispositions cloud the brilliance of our present days, they would be too happy. Grief holds a magnifying glass to every misfortune, and joy a diminishing one: while we look through the latter our sorrows insensibly vanish.

We were, this morning, very seriously recapitulating our faults.

"To tell you my greatest," said my Lord gaily, "I have been deceived so often, that suspicion has infused itself into my character; and, if a spark of coquetry lurk in your heart, you must consider in time whether you can sacrifice it to my foible."

"Oh! I will give you leisure to judge from my conduct before you marry me."

"Malicious creature! I have a mind to punish you by taking you at your word."

"To cease jesting, my Lord, could you see yourself with my eyes, you would know that this world cannot give you a rival."

He paused a moment, lost in a tender contemplation, which gave his eyes a matchless lustre; then, pressing me to his generous heart, added, in a broken tone—"Perhaps if you thought less highly of me, my love, you could not make me happy; nor, if I thought thus of myself, could I make you so."

"But is it you who propose these doubts?" returned I: "you, who see in my withered frame, and broken spirits, such evident testimonies of unabated affection? Ah! what ought not I then to apprehend, since, even at my most favourable moment, I could no more bear a competition of person with Lady Diana Selwyn than of rank and fortune?"

"What, then," cried he, "is person, in the great calculation of life? For when will she inspire a passion like that I feel for you? Perhaps, had you been a model of beauty I should have loved you less, since severe experience would have guarded my senses from leading me into a second error. The hour is yet pre-

sent when the charms, the indescribable charms, of my Cecilia, first sunk into my heart. I then rather felt than saw your graces; but looking for the cause in your eyes, I soon found none corresponded so well with my own. Every day, every hour, either added to your attraction or my sense of it. In truth, each as it passed heightened in you that sensibility which is the essence of beauty. I sometimes considered why I thought you so pre-eminently engaging; but as the fascination was intellect, and varied every moment, I never could fix. Nor will that fascination ever lessen. Time may, perhaps, rob your cheek of its fairness, and your eyes of their lustre; but your soul, ever young, ever lovely, will glow on the first, and beam in the last, till He who gave recals the rich and fleeting essence."

Oh, sweet and touching flattery! But did I not rely on the generosity of his soul, rather than the influence of mine, I should have a poor dependence. That soul he so sweetly speaks of, no longer

found pleasure in its dwelling when alienated from him. Ready to take its flight, there is little more left of my frame than a ruin. Re-animated by the voice of love, I already think of looking my best again; and time may re-kindle something of the fascination which he ascribes to the creature of his choice. I never had a grace superior to love, and that cannot now desert me.

Is it not grievous to have had florid health while it was a burden, and now to fluctuate between pain of body and pleasure of mind? I know not how I should find strength to write, but that my sister understands none of these emotions, and thinks, perhaps, this world affords more Westburys than one. Lady Harington laughs at love; and Sir George indulges her in every busy caprice which may lead her from considering its power. He is in the right: the woman who is not born to share, ought never to know, the happiness which exists in the charm of mutually-consenting hearts—the beautiful follies

of real love. Poor Percival is quicker-sighted!—"You are at length, then, happy, Madam," said he, last night, in a low voice. "Ever may you continue so! It was no mitigation to my misfortune to know that you partook the calamity."

LETTER CXX.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

Orange Hill.

AMELIA! my dear Amelia! I throw my arms in imagination around you. Our still responding hearts throb speechless congratulations. Scarce, even now, dare I credit my senses; scarce dare I believe that I am really the wife, the chosen wife, of Lord Westbury.

The license arrived in the morning, and the chaplain with it. It was judged impossible that we should meet in secret

at any neighbouring church, and I gave up my opinion on that subject. Lady Harington contrived to send her cousins and Percival to pay a tea-visit to a lady who leaves the country to-morrow, and I was married in the saloon, at Sir George Harington's, at eight this evening. My sister and Lady Harington only were present, except Sir George, who officiated as father. No parade was observed; nor did even a servant of the family, I believe, suspect the truth, for such a ceremony is rarely performed here in a private house. My Lord had given his own directions to Alton, who guarded us from intruders. I found myself too much fluttered to encounter the eyes of the company on their return, and my beloved was indulgent enough to allow me to come hither alone, faithfully promising to stay and sup at Sir George's. This arrangement was the only one that I could have supported, for my strength and spirits quite failed me the moment I got home. Yet, while the chaise drove gently on with me, the glory

of the evening soothed my agitated soul: what a rich and glowing purple sun-set did I behold! Lady Harington would fain have been my companion, but it appeared to me that solitude was preferable to any society, except I could have had your own.

Neither had I breathed a syllable of such an addition being likely to be made in my small family; but, good Heaven! had you seen Sally's astonished, delighted face! Poor girl! she does nothing since but break the flower-jars, and overturn my work-frame or baskets. I shall not wonder if she and her husband fall prostrate at the feet of Lord Westbury—so struck are they with his title and superior manners, and so rejoiced to see that, though I sometimes sigh and cry, I yet am happy.

Yes, I am indeed happy! A more peaceful emotion than I hoped for begins to diffuse itself through my soul, and gild the long, or, as it may be, short futurity. Ah! who that knew the bliss of acting

rightly, would dare to deviate! Destined, then, to look forward at best with fear, and backward with repentance; grasping a felicity which every hour threatens to snatch away, and which loses its dearest charm in the fearful anticipation: but when, at last, that moment really arrives, when he whom alone we adore forsakes us, and life is bereaved of its value—not even to dare to complain—to find in the heart only a confirmation of the justice of your fate, and the unspeakable misery of having yielded up your temporal, nay eternal, peace, for a pleasure which, when past, turns to pain! When I recollect that this has been the lot of thousands, and might have been my own, how do I bow my soul in gratitude to Him who lent me fortitude to resist my erring senses, and crowned the self-denial with so ample a reward! This moment is a reward beyond all sacrifices! —this precious, inestimable moment! when every thing derives a charm from the serenity of my soul. All nature seems to partake of my happiness; or, rather, a

happiness so pure and perfect expands through universal nature.

The jasmine and woodbines inwoven over the windows perfume the study; and the moon-beams, chequering the floor, diffuse around me a divine tranquillity, at once embellishing and chastening a retreat which is consecrated to a husband, and adorned to receive him. No pang of conscience—no merited apprehension either of God or man, alloys the tender luxury of this expectation.

Such is the charm, to well-governed minds, of matrimony.—Holy institution! without which woman would, perhaps, ever be frail; sacrificing to the first lost virtue every other: and man as often ungrateful. A tie like this, which God himself is called to witness, sanctifies the confidence, purifies the union, and, comprehending in itself every rite of reason, religion, and nature, alone can preserve the good order of society, or make us completely happy. Yet, as secresy is the soul of love, why should matrimony resign a

charm? Its usual modes are often disgusting, always oppressive; and, to avoid these, I have stolen from the company; but it was only to shut myself up with the image of him whom I adore. Weary of common conversation, common society, he will now steal through the silence of the night to a heart beating for him alone: so will his right have the sweetness of a gift, and be remembered for ever with pleasure.

Have I been romantic? In truth I have only been sincere. But as if the generous excesses of the heart would not evaporate fast enough in the common intercourse of life, the worldly wise usually put an extinguisher over them in the word romance. Even the mistakes of innocence should be corrected with caution, lest young people learn duplicity before they learn any thing else. Had I children, this enthusiasm would be, in my eyes, among their most promising propensities, since without it we may very easily be led to vice, but are hardly ever

animated to virtue; external objects alone attracting cold hearts.

Adieu, dearest Amelia! My Lord insists on sealing my letter, and hardly leaves me leisure to add, for the first time, the long, long desired name of

CECILIA WESTBURY.

LETTER CXXI.

TO FRANCIS TREVILIAN, ESQ.

Orange Hill.

FROM the sweetest cottage which Love ever chose for his residence, your friend dates himself the happiest of the happy. After all our various sufferings and anxieties, yesterday united me to my Cecilia. Ah! mine, and mine only! for her marriage with Colonel Percival was merely nominal, though, perhaps, his death alone saved her from being eventually its victim. Yesterday was, likewise,

the day of my birth: nor could I avoid reviewing, with some wonder, my past life, which obliged me at thirty to solemnize a second marriage with the same secresy which marked my first: but, ah! how different is my feeling! The world no longer is new to me: I am no longer misled by my senses. A tenderness more delicate and just, though not less animated, decides my choice, and makes me with truth declare to you, that I knew not, in the marriage of passion, a shadow of that felicity which now is mine. The senses then governed the heart; the heart now acts upon the senses, and approving reason meliorates both.

Who has ever known to grace, with the delicacy of Cecilia, the bands of Hymen? In her cottage I could almost forget all which I inherited, and be content with competency and happiness. In truth, the dear creature is persuaded that we have little more to hope for; as the tale has, I know not how or why, circulated that I am a ruined man; and I am amus-

ed with seeing the refined address which Cecilia employs to prevent my missing those indulgences that, at her own option, may be bestowed upon both. From Harington I have not concealed the truth; and have agreed with him to mortify two insolent nieces of Colonel Percival, who most cordially hate my unoffending Cecilia; nor do I doubt but we have found out how to do this in their own way.

Beautiful as our cottage is, I cannot inhabit in peace a place which my love holds only as the widow of Colonel Percival; especially as his nephew is the right owner. It is cruel enough to take from that gentleman the woman whom he adores, without taking his house too. Yet, as the health of my bride is not established sufficiently for her to undertake a long journey, and she is fond of this country, I must prepare the best home I can for her at my old mansion; some part of which must, with all speed, be better furnished. Servants, plate, whatever is necessary for more

than comfort, we must get together at St. Edmund's Vale with all expedition, for my secret cannot long be kept; and I shall enjoy the surprise of Cecilia, as she will that of her party, when it becomes obvious that we have no cares—except we, like other new-married people, ingeniously set about making some.

One anxiety has, however, pressed heavily upon my spirits; for though I could write to Lord Winchester in the style of manly explanation, it was an effort to address his lovely daughter. I send you the copy of my letter to Lady Diana by the groom, who is to convey that, with an epistle to her father, as I wish to be beforehand with the officious newspapers in announcing my marriage. I knew not how to avail myself of Cecilia's judgement, without being wanting in consideration for Lady Diana; nor had courage to encounter a subject with both, upon which a single syllable might be too little or too much. I give you the fruit of long reflexion and painful feeling.

" TO LADY DIANA SELWYN.

" In the extraordinary and delicate situation in which I find myself placed by unforeseen circumstances, my dear Lady Diana, I cannot resolve the doubt in my own bosom, whether propriety will allow this address; and I can only, if I encroach, implore you, with the goodness which you have ever extended towards me, to pardon an error in which will has no share. Were I to remain entirely silent, I must in a manner condemn myself; and I know not how to incur a disgrace which I should blush to deserve.

" When first I had Lord Winchester's permission to fall at the feet of my lovely cousin, she may, perhaps, remember I confessed to her that which I am now obliged to recapitulate. What, indeed, but a rooted and unconquerable passion, could, at such a moment, have divided my attention? In the hope that my sincerity appeared to Lady Diana Selwyn

rather as a merit than a fault, I venture all which follows.

"The beloved, but as I thought ungrateful, woman whom I had followed to France, when first, my sweet cousin, I met you there, had been the single object of a fond attachment for nearly three years. I need hardly remark, to an observation so quick and delicate as your own, that when she became so I had only a heart to give. This interesting young creature had early sacrificed a fond prepossession to a refined and elevated sense of her duty; and that she might persevere in her sense of right, finally withdrew from my knowledge. I had previously pledged my faith to her, if ever I became again the master of my own liberty; and to make this vow mutual was all the indulgence which my fondest entreaties could win from her. A combination of infamous artifices were planned in Paris, by a woman who disgraces her rank and sex, to rob my beloved of my confidence and esteem. I too, too easily,

relied upon appearances; and after I had crossed the Channel merely in search of Miss Rivers, I returned to England in the firm conviction that I could never make her my wife. So effectual had been the base delusion, that when tenderness induced her afterwards to venture a remote and delicate effort to remind me of my engagement, I coldly and deliberately freed her from the vow by which we were mutually bound, and by a fiat of my own gave the heart which I had half-broken to another, that he might break it entirely.

" Worn out with chagrin and disappointment, I no longer expected happiness from love; when circumstances rendered me an inmate with you, and I was allowed to devote all of my thoughts that I could command to a lady whom I must ever regret having known at all, since I only knew her too late. When I remember the firm resolution I made to merit that honour which my lovely cousin did not deny me her permission to hope for,

I feel even at this trying moment a little reconciled to myself.

" Chance, and chance only, brought me a week since to my estate in this country; where, in the house of Sir George Harington, I once more beheld the darling of my soul, wasting away in neglect, seclusion, and silence. Judge, my dear Lady Diana, what I felt when I discovered, thus late, my error, my unkindness, my ingratitude. Cecilia disdained not my tears, my repentance, my offered atonement; and, as the only proof of her forgiveness that I would admit to be such, she gave me, at length, herself. The heart knows no forms but its own; and when once she had consented to become mine, she deigned to pardon my impatience to attempt restoring, by a lover's fondness and a husband's name, the fair form which sorrow has, I fear, bent incurably towards the grave.

" To common minds, this kind of apology would perhaps double my offence; but when I reflect upon the dignity of

the nature which I now address, I feel persuaded of an accorded pardon; and that, far from rejecting my devoted friendship, Lady Diana Selwyn will allow me to present to her, in my suffering bride, a being like herself; through whose merit I may hope hereafter to derive that consideration in society which I have hitherto owed merely to the partiality of my friends.

"Am I any longer culpable in your eyes, my charming cousin? Oh! could I once know that my conduct was approved by you, and pardoned by your respected parents, what could possibly be wanting to the felicity of

"Your devoted friend

"And kinsman,

"WESTBURY!"

Such is my esteem for Lady Diana Selwyn, that I am fully persuaded, whatever her heart may suffer, she will make an effort, rather than add to the cruel chagrin which she knows I must feel either by

silence or reproaches. As to Lord Winchester,—why, he would deceive himself before, and may now. But of him I think not. Provided that he may have grandsons, he cares not what page in the Peerage holds the coronet of his daughter's husband.

"My Cecilia! wherefore venture that song? Thy enfeebled voice has no longer strength for it!"—The sweet creature sits at the piano-forte, to which her fingers again give a magic charm. But ah! her constitution is impaired, I fear, beyond recovery.

Entreat that Mrs. Trevilian will have the goodness to select some elegant undresses for my love. I would have Cecilia find every accommodation, as well as her apartments, ready at St. Edmund's Vale. An Abigail of your lady's choosing may bring them down. This kind of attendant is due to Lady Westbury's rank, though no way necessary to one whose delicacy makes her shrink in all instances from the parade of life.

LETTER CXXII.

TO FRANCIS TREVILIAN, ESQ.

I COMPLIMENT you, Frank, upon your triumph over a vice no way, *entre nous*, confined to the female sex. Confess that you would have given a trifle to know the contents of Lady Diana Selwyn's letter. Had you been tempted to peep into it, I could have pardoned you. Here, however, it follows.

"WHAT am I to infer, my Lord, from your address to me?—that you only mean to ensure my friendship in future, or would soften the supposed effect of your conduct on my heart. If I were convinced that the latter motive dictated your letter, some portion of Lord Winchester's pride would mingle in the composition of his daughter. But, no; the man who dares address a woman on such a subject,

must feel self-acquitted; and let not me misjudge him.

"I will for once, my Lord, forget the painful lesson of humility which you have taught me, and regard your appeal to my feelings in the most flattering light. Alas! I greatly need this little consolation! and as self-deceit has already been more injurious to my peace than it ever can be again, I will endeavour to persuade myself that compassion had no share in your candour. You ask me if you are any longer culpable in my eyes. Did you judge my heart by your own, when you thought that I ever should accuse you? Your conduct has always been too uniformly honourable for me selfishly to conclude myself to be the first instance in which you have deviated; and though, perhaps, I might be reasonably supposed the most hurt of any of my family, I, in reality, am the least so. Filial duty and affection naturally disposed me to follow the lead of my parents, but Lord Westbury has never known me so

vain as to imagine that I had merits or charms enough to entitle me to his choice; and having escaped that mortification, I think I can sustain every other.

"You may well speak with such grief and tenderness of your Lady. Ah! what misery must she have suffered! Can a life of unequalled attention ever make her amends?—But why were you, at first, half-explicit with me? In that am I most hurt, most offended. I should have guessed, perhaps, at the fact. You had then earlier been happy, and I, in contributing to your felicity, less wretched. But let me not add to your self-reproach. May all your wishes be completed, and I consent to become the sacrifice to your happiness! Ah, Lord Westbury! you have doubly decided my destiny!

"Write to me no more, I implore you: reason, decorum, every thing forbids it. Of all the friends whom you left here, one only remains. My father and mother are weak enough to impute to you the deceit which they prac-

tised upon themselves, nor will allow either of your letters or visits. Pardon this unreasonable resentment: it is only proportioned to their former partiality: and if any unfortunate occurrence should expose you to tokens of their displeasure, think of me, and forbear resenting them. I demand this as the test of that friendship which you offer me. Time and circumstances may hereafter enable me to show how highly I prize your offer; till when I entreat you to remember, that, by whatever title I may hereafter be called, my heart will never prefer any to that of your friend, but proudly vie in generosity with your own and Lady Westbury's, to whose favour I thus introduce myself, persuaded that a partial sense of your merit can never render me odious to one who has so much of it.

"Lady Harington writes as you do of your bride. I desire you will tell that charming woman, she must not supercede in every heart

"Your friend and cousin,

"Diana Selwyn."

I was with Cecilia when Alton gave this into my hand; and tore it open with a trembling impatience. My wife, with that refinement almost peculiar to herself, riveted her eyes on some work which she had been before employed upon; till my heart overflowing with admiration of the two angels, I threw my arms around the one by me, and wept forth my strong emotion on her bosom. Cecilia took the offered letter; and as she read that, I read her intelligent countenance, warm with sentiment, feeling, virtue: a modest flush glowed on it, as she perused what related to herself; over which flowed in silence a flood of generous tears for Lady Diana. Kissing the traces of that fair hand, she grasped mine, and sighing said—"If for me you could give up such an angel; great, indeed, my Edward, is your partiality!"

Sir George, who "still loves a tune, though unable to dance,"—that is, a plot, though he has done with intrigue—has been almost my daily ambassador at St.

Edmund's Vale, whither we are to remove to-morrow, though my love knows it not. She imagines the whole demesne is sold, and the company invited to dine there for the last time that I shall ever have a right to ask any. She and her damsels have had some anxious consultations, I fancy, concerning that dinner of bacon and greens, which she will find ready prepared, without any interference on her part. "But why should we go at all?" she cries every now and then: "surely it will make you melancholy." I have told her that my grandmother left, as an heir-loom, an old cabinet, which was to be opened only by my wife; and that as Henrietta never got so far north, the office devolves upon her. She shrugs her shoulders and submits.

The sweet Diana, and her generous epistle, engross a great share of my thoughts. Methinks I could sooner have pardoned myself, had she been weak, haughty, and resentful; but the virtues of these two charming women have caused me

almost as much suffering as the vices and machinations of that fiend in human shape, Lady Killarney. Let her not escape a punishment on earth! is my continual prayer. Let infamy and pain embitter her days, and when the pang is sharpest let her suddenly meet Lady Westbury! A merit like Cecilia's, thus rewarded by every earthly happiness, must excite such a sense of envy and hatred in her calumniator, as will avenge her own cause.

I loath myself whenever I recal the hours of folly and of vice which I have passed with the abandoned fury! Good Heaven! had I discernment to adore Cecilia, and blindness to endure that wretch? I shrink at this recollection from the chaste wife of my heart, nor dare profane her spotless frame with those arms which once encircled a devil.

Harington has been here, to say that all is ready at St. Edmund's Vale. He enjoys the mortification meditated for two conceited daughters of Goliah, who claim, by means of old Percival, a relationship

to his wife, as they once did to mine; and who are the most censorious, insolent creatures in the world. My poor Cecilia lived in absolute dread of their discovering our marriage, which was in a manner stolen, lest she should incur their censure. I did not contradict her; but the situation in which I stood with the Winchester family obliged me to find means to declare it immediately: that I well knew would place my wife above the malice of her tall quondam cousins. Sir George therefore, at my own desire, led the party, as for a ramble, to our cot, the morning after our wedding. His lady's key brought them quietly through the garden-gate, and, as he dispenses often enough with ceremony, he threw open the study-door the very moment he had rapped at it, and discovered me, like a lazy rogue, sitting with my hair about my ears upon the sofa, by the side of my beloved, who was neat, indeed, as a bride. Up she started, all dismay and confusion, and half-overturned the breakfast things;

wishing me, I verily believe, snugly hid under the sofa which I occupied. Sir George, however, advanced smiling. The secret was out. The tall Misses drew up, most emphatically saying, "That it was needless to wish *us* joy!" at which I stopped short with a bow. A young fellow of merit, of the Percival family, wished us joy too; but, in faith, I thought the word would have choaked him. Harington had before told me of his true passion for Cecilia; and that he and his lady had been bent on uniting her to this young officer. However, I now have a project of the same kind in favour of Marianne Rivers, which will show him how much I respect his merit. My wife is charmed with this; and, like a true woman, fancies it already completed. Our sister is, therefore, to remain here with Lady Harington; and when Percival takes possession of Orange Hill, which he will in a few days, he cannot be in that solitary Paradise and not look out for an Eve, especially as I shall just have carried mine

from it; and where can he find one half so beautiful as my new sister? Yet I doubt whether this plan will do. Percival's very choice proves him possessed of life, ardour, sense, and sensibility: how, then, can he withdraw his affections from a heart like his own, to bestow them on a glowing statue? for Miss Rivers appears to me expressly Pope's Chloe:

> She, when her lover pants upon her breast,
> Can mark the figures on an Indian chest;
> And when she sees a friend in deep despair,
> Admires how much a chintz excels mohair.

Neither foolish nor sensible, Marianne has one of those odd understandings (which I ought not to call odd, considering how common they are) which seem quite adequate to the claims of society—capable enough of acting up to a duty, or conceiving a compliment, but without penetration for a criticism, a remark, or a repartee. Her own eyes, handsome as they are, merely guard her from external objects; nor can she guess how those of

other people may become mirrors to the soul. Of this water-gruel kind are half her sex; and most of this class are called good women. Without offence, however, females of this description are dreadful associates. No; I must have a companion whom matrimony only enlivens, by calling into action the latent powers of the soul: who, wild and variable as a mistress, yet guarded and chaste as a vestal, is every thing by turns but undeserving: in short, that very being who now summons me. Happy is it for you that I cannot hear her heavenly voice without grudging to the very echoes their power of imitation, otherwise I know not how long I should have made an epistle which seems voluminous already.

Mrs. Trevilian, with all her partiality for Lady Diana, *must* love Lady Westbury. She will not be able to know and resist her, says your

Happy friend,

WESTBURY.

LETTER CXXIII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

YOU have read the Arabian Nights, and certain Fairy Tales, which I well remember were once your delight. But not Aladin himself, nor any other distinguished eastern architect, in all those heterogeneous productions, ever raised an aërial castle that could more surprise me than that which I now inhabit. Lord Westbury exults in his own address, and my egregious credulity. Ah! where is the merit of duping those who are unsuspecting by nature, and fools by education!—So, he is gone.—I meant, my dear, to cure him of looking over my shoulder.

Here have I been solely intent on consoling this poor undone man (as I was led to suppose), by the most unremitting assiduity; flying his sight whenever my wounded soul suggested to me

that he might feel the want of some habitual indulgence; while he was as intently watching these secret impulses, delighted to see that he could at last deceive me. But if this speculation upon mind added to his happiness, why should I complain! Hardly, indeed, can I value the enjoyment of wealth, since, in possessing him, I could never know the want of it.

Among other things, your silence, my dear, amazed me; nor could I divine what occasioned it: but it did not accord with my Lord's project, it seems, to let me duly receive your letters, and this morning he gave me two before I arose. "Your over-kindness did wring tears from me," Amelia. Joy is, perhaps, as profuse of them as sorrow. Well may you exult in your penetration. But no; I would not, even to avoid the miseries which I have felt, have been able to suspect such an elaborate mischief. My heart must, in that case, have been as black and as callous as Lady Killarney's own. Miss Eliza Rivers, it is plain, in-

tercepted—by being on the spot, and of the same name as myself—Lord Westbury's letter to me; but the plan on which she and her diabolical friend afterwards proceeded, can be traced only by themselves. Eliza Rivers, it is likewise obvious, received the visit he meant for me. She, too, certainly must have run away with the vile Louvigny: but what could tempt her to blend my name with hers, I know not: some enormous bribe, I fancy, from Lady Killarney. Thus while I, lost in wonder on the cause of my own undoing, was breaking my heart in silence, these two furies were tearing open, with a pleasure truly diabolical, those letters which would have restored my peace. Rightly, indeed, did they conjecture that no explanation could happen till too late. Ah! it is, indeed, too late! Love may sweeten my days, but not even that can prolong them!

I will not dwell on this painful anticipation.

You may easily judge of my surprise,

when I heard my Lord invite Sir George and his party to dine with us at St. Edmund's Vale. As a large company was present, I could not remonstrate; and when I tried to dissuade him from this, I found him so fixed on the invitation that I rather chose to let him have his own way, though I feared that he would repent too late. I could not discover how many servants he had there, or what kind of a dinner he would be able to give to his friends; but as he seemed extremely easy, I did not make myself otherwise. Yesterday morning Lady Harington, with the Misses Frazier and my sister, came in the coach of the former to our little habitation. Sir George and Captain Percival accompanied them on horseback. My rural equipage now was brought forward by my handsome rustic, who had been exquisitely curled by the hand of his wife to attend me: but had you seen Lord Westbury stick his hands in his sides, and laugh himself almost into convulsions, while Joseph stood bursting with wrath

at this insult on a conveyance which he thinks splendid, and a dress and figure that he by no means despises, you would never have forgotten it. Walking, with an ironical air, round and round the little chaise, my Lord at last asked me " If I took him for a Cheapside grocer, bound on a Sunday morning for Newington Butts? Where *could* I pick up such a vehicle?" I, as well as my footman, began now to be a little discomposed. " Mighty fine," thought I, " if all were as it should be with your Lordship's steward!" Captain Percival however, no more daunted than myself, tendered me his hand, and in stepped I to my own little chaise. He condescended to personate the grocer, and my gay Lord rode away, as I suppose had been previously settled, upon his friend's beautiful horse.

The riders far outstripped us; but a drive of singular beauty terminated in an avenue of elm trees, whose height and size made them seem almost coëval with creation. My Lord was at his own door

to receive us; and with chagrin I saw him conduct Lady Harington, through the most dismal of Gothic halls, to a parlour of singular magnitude, which was not a whit more cheerful, with immense casements, clumsy ornaments in carving, and tattered velvet furniture. Well, here we sat down, while some clean country girls brought us strawberries and cream; which, for want of more variety of refreshments, every one partook of. I glanced my eye now and then towards my Lord, and finding that nothing seemed to discompose him, I resolved that nothing should discompose me, although the shrugs of the tall Misses, as Lord Westbury calls the Fraziers, might well have done so.

After a very pretty chilling, which was called by us all—in compliment—refreshing ourselves, my Lord asked if we would like to walk in the gardens. I shivered at the proposal, already frozen in that rambling, dusky parlour, where the sun, I fancy, never peeps in upon a dog-day, and I had unluckily put on a

dress calculated for the heat of his beams. As, however, "any change must better our condition," up we all started, rather rejoiced to find that we were not, like the lady in Comus, bound by gums or spells to our miserable high-backed chairs. The gardens were not in a newer taste than the house, being chiefly composed of evergreens, notched and scalloped like a Christmas-pie. The walks, however, I soon found were bounded by rocky hills, at intervals beautifully exposed and covered. Here all the laborious efforts of Art ended, and Nature did her own work, impressing us at once with originality and beauty. A cleft showed a passage through these rocks, which my Lord invited us to descend. The long flight of easy steps terminated in a cell; at the extent of which another arched entrance was obvious; whither we flew, and all alike stood still in astonishment and admiration. A verdant and varying declivity spread before the natural arch, encompassing a clear and

noble lake: part of its margin ran into glens and rocky thickets, while the rest, smooth and verdant as the meadows of Twickenham, was washed by the pellucid water. Here and there a brook trickled down the hills opposite; and at one place, several rills uniting, formed a fine cascade, and fed the body of water. The west side of the valley opened to an extensive view of woods and cultivated land, terminated by a very distant arm of the sea. In the lake appeared two islets, or aits, almost covered with trees, which, as I suppose, sheltered the musicians, who, on our appearing, began to play. The hills around re-echoed the horns and clarinets, and formed a singularly beautiful concert. I have seen many admired productions of Art, but none in which her aid was unseen till now. I could have taken root at the gate of the hermit's cell; but all the company were not of my mind: I was, therefore, obliged to attend on their ignorant curiosity, and abandon this exquisite landscape.

Again we re-visited the melancholy parlour; when my Lord, seating Lady Harington at an organ which it appeared to me had been recently placed there, asked me if I would take this opportunity of inspecting his grandmother's cabinet. I followed him in silence up a staircase on which you might turn a coach, when, throwing open the door, he led me into a splendid dressing-room, from whence I saw a chamber and closet fitted up with equal elegance, and all my things scattered about as if I had slept there the preceding night. Near a comfortable fire hung a magnificent undress; and close by it stood James, the late Lady Westbury's woman, who, with a courtesy, inquired if I pleased to wear that. I turned from her to my Lord, in mute astonishment. At some sign of his, James disappeared; and, taking up an inlaid cabinet, where I beheld every ornament which taste could invent or money procure, Lord Westbury threw his arms around me, and inquired how I

liked the old lady's legacy? "Ah! I begin to discover that I have been cheated into a splendor made useless by yourself!" cried I. "What could she want to whom you had given your heart and this hand?" cried I, falling at his feet, and bathing that dear hand with my tears. I heard the door open. "Oh, come in! pray come in!" cried the most engaging of men: "to be sure the sight is unusual, and you may boast of having witnessed something like a miracle; for to catch a woman of quality on her knees to her husband, can hardly be called less. My wife appears to such advantage in this attitude, that, did I not long to fold her to my heart, I could like to let her gratify my eyes by remaining in it."—"Do," added Sir George, "for the honour of our authority, and to show the ladies their duty. Ah, Sophy! Sophy! when shall I see you on your knees to me?"—"Whenever you are as young and as handsome as Lord Westbury," returned his spouse, with

her usual drollery; which must have been more diverting to Sir George's friends, than himself.

This whole scene, which had been planned by Sir George to mortify the Fraziers, did not lose its effect: they laughed, but it was with an air of malignity, rather than pleasure. "One question of mine, then, my Lord," cried I, "would have overturned your scheme: and had any thing except fortune been the subject, your dependence on my delicacy might have been too great. But you knew me too well to imagine that I should ever inquire how you had impaired the estates which you inherited."—"They are as unimpaired," returned Sir George, "as your temper, or Lord Westbury's tenderness; and the foolish advertisement which set town and country in arms, was only the caprice of a man who is too fashionable to know the whole value of the advantages he possesses. I fancy my Lord is no longer so ready to part with this estate."—"Its near neighbourhood to

yours, Sir George," politely replied my love, " sets it above all price in my estimation."—" I think this is among the deceptions which a fair lady may overlook," added the good-natured Baronet. " But I have been too much delighted to recollect the cause of our intrusion: it is only to wish that you may enjoy each other, and your good fortune, as long as both shall deserve it; which is not limiting your days to the scanty term of our own." With this compliment, which was at once a stretch of the Baronet's invention and understanding, Sir George saluted me. Our laughter and raillery had hardly subsided, when, by a glance of her eye, Lady Harington led mine towards the Fraziers, who were scornfully surveying the diamonds which my sister was playfully turning over. " Come, it is but fair," said my Lord, " to leave Cecilia to judge whether the reward is adequate to the humiliation. My love," cried he, returning, " you are yet a bride: a body of honest folks hope to see

you as such. I have troubled Mrs. Trevilian to provide you a few necessaries, and a servant whom I thought would please you. Honour my friend's taste and my intention, by wearing whatever you may like best."—"Too happy to have such a guide on this and every occasion," said I, pressing his hand, "assure yourself that I would not wish another." He smiled his thanks, and flew after the company.

I could wish that Mrs. Trevilian had made choice of any attendant for me, rather than the late Lady Westbury's; but as upon her recommendation the poor woman was obliged to depend, it was natural that she should re-instate her in the same family. Mrs. James now made her appearance a second time, as waiting to dress me, and I immediately relieved her mind, by kindly recognising her. She had not, till recollection thus befriended me, appeared to use her own. Perhaps she was hardly more surprised to find, in the bride of Lord Westbury, a face so familiar to her eyes, than I was at

discerning the care and expense which he had bestowed on the apartment destined for me. Nothing, however, can render a mansion so long desolated a tolerable home.

When I had exchanged my dress, James, descending, acquainted her Lord; who hastened once more to conduct me to that dismal parlour; where I now found, arrayed in their best, all the tenants of the little estate. The sudden appearance of their noble landlord, and his declaration, that, far from selling St. Edmund's Vale, he meant to pass a part of every year there, had so recommended me to them, as the primary cause of this resolution, that they, as Dryden has it,

Devour'd me o'er and o'er with vast delight!

Lord Westbury, after duly welcoming the honest souls, gave into my hand an elegant basket filled with white-and-silver knots, which he entreated me to "*make favours indeed,* by bestowing them my-

self." I obeyed him readily; but with what a reverence did the rustics receive the little compliment! One of the silver-headed farmers assured me, that, God willing, he would keep it to wear at the wedding of my son.

A feast had been ordered for the good people, in their own way; and my Lord now led me to a suite of rooms which had been repaired and furnished for the occasion. I found all my friends assembled there; and soon was summoned to preside at an entertainment suitable to Lord Westbury's rank and fortune.

When the company met after dinner, my Lord drew me aside, to suggest the propriety of my rendering up immediately the deeds of my jointure, as well as possession of Orange Hill, to Captain Percival. He had, I know not how, procured the writings from the lawyers. When he left me to the touching task, the amiable Percival appeared, summoned by his orders. I cannot describe my own embarrassment, or his delicate conduct.

Saying little, but looking every thing, he took the parchments, with the silent grief and useless reluctance we should feel at the tendered legacy of the friend whom we love best. Amiable Percival! Nature allied us, and I must yet have a right in thee! at least I will hope it. Would that I could animate my sister's heart! Sensibility itself, seems in her rather a chilling than a glowing principle. Yet one day she will be his: so, at least, thinks every one but the individual whose determination will ultimately form her fate.

This day was destined to be the most remarkable one in my life; since, though many a mistress has been as highly flattered, rarely can a wife boast such distinction.

We walked to an antique summer-house overhung with ivy, where tea had been prepared. It catches a bounded view of the valley I have described, and is exquisitely Gothic. As the sun descended, some grave conversation arose, when Sophia, half in jest, half in earnest,

expressed some doubts of Sir George's constancy:—would that I could add without reason! To withdraw her attention, I turned towards my Lord; and, resting my hand on his shoulder, asked, if she doubted, what ought I to do, who had more than once lost doubt in certainty? Turning his head, with that sweet careless air peculiar to himself, he touched my hand with his lips, and sung in a mellow soft voice these words, from some author out of my recollection:

"All that in woman is ador'd
In thy dear self I find,
Since the whole sex can but afford
The lovely and the kind.
Then why should I my fate deplore,
Or other loves pursue?
When change itself can give no more,
'Tis easy to be true!"

Profoundly silent myself, I hardly observed that the circle were alike so; while, captivated with the sight of a happiness which he was not born to participate, the amiable Percival enjoyed the sensibility

even of his rival. I shall be doubly destroyed if my Lord continue thus to call forth my feelings, and now die of mere felicity. Ah, my dear! I cannot but pause to add, that this is the first time that my life has been so endangered.

The dews of evening made it prudent to return to the house; when the sound of fiddles reaching us as we approached it, Lady Harington, with her usual sprightly humour, held out her hand and danced on in the figure. Lord Westbury accepted the challenge, and conducted her to a hall, where the younger part of our rustic company had formed a set of dancers, while the sager souls sat by admiring them. I withdrew to join the spectators; but Sophia, in defiance both of her own rank and her partner's, struck in among the dancers, and was followed by her cousin Percival, who had contrived to draw away the blushing irresolute Marianne. The tall Misses, shocked at once with this indecorum and the recollection that there was not one partner left whom

they could tolerate, were obliged to sit down by me, who wanted, alas! constitution to partake the hilarity.

The party all left us this morning, Sir George excepted, who is gone out with my Lord and a surveyor to see the timber marked, inquire into the rents, and suggest such improvements as may enhance the value of the property without injury to the tenants. Their absence has given me the leisure which I have, you will grant, as readily bestowed in my turn.

* * * * * * *

This husband of mine, for I think I shall pay an ill compliment to the race of peers to call so active a man a lord, converts himself now into an errant farmer; rises with the sun, rides or walks till I am visible and breakfast is ready, catches it hastily, and disappears again; nor do I behold him till the dinner-bell rings; when, to do him justice, he resumes the nobleman, and passes the rest of the day in any manner which I or my com-

pany propose. A complexion like his, suffers by this mode of life; and his forehead alone retains its dazzling whiteness: but he is gay, florid, happy; what, then, have I to wish?

From an utter neglect of this remote seat, Lord Westbury has now conceived quite a passion for it. Every day the ancient Gothic front undergoes a fresh revisal. He studies to correct the proportions while he improves the taste; and is fixed on re-building this mansion of the old baron's, with a grandeur worthy the Clifford name. Nor is the furniture overlooked. Our tattered chairs are reserved for models; and a bedstead—heavy enough to freight a merchant-ship, or indeed half-build one—has been brushed, till it is discovered to have been carved with the history of the Bible. To own all the cowardice of your poor friend, the rats and spiders, which these active manœuvres cause to emigrate, give me more apprehension, than the doughty discoveries can counterbalance.

Yet it must be owned, that, when rebuilt, this house will be a beautiful residence. Embosomed among woods which are almost as old as itself, it presents no other prospect than that of peace and plenty. All around extends an ample park: but it has long been farmed out; and in being sown with corn, oats, and all kinds of grain, loses a right to that name. Through these rich plantations my Lord only means to have meandering paths and roads cut; among which will be left clumps of forest-trees and flowering shrubs:—thus may he unite use with simplicity. It is possible to build with a prospect of St. Edmund's beautiful Vale, from whence this seat derives its name; but then the house cannot be well supplied with water, and will be exposed to the bitter winds of winter; for which all its beauties could not, in my mind, compensate. If we are very near a fine view, without commanding it, we are naturally enticed into taking that degree of exercise which invigorates the constitution.

I am obliged to go abroad much more than I would choose, to save myself from expiring from mere want of breath. Lord Westbury drives me every evening in his phaeton, which looks down with a St. James's-street contempt on my City vehicle. He has not been able to persuade me to mount a horse, though the physicians concur in the efficacy of that rough motion: but my father's prejudice, at which I once murmured, has now infected my own mind, and I am not able to fancy riding either a feminine amusement or a safe one. My Lord says, that when I can keep within the limits of the park at Arlington, and am provided with a gentle creature on which he means to mount me, he will himself lead my palfrey if he can no other way induce me to ride. It is certain that I shall conform to whatever he pleases, but I do not hope restoration from either Nature or Art. Indeed, my dear (though I dare not venture to tell my Lord so), I feel an universal languor, an internal decay, to which not even the

glow of happiness can render me insensible. Ah! how different from the gay spring of youthful delight, the elasticity of a heart as yet unacquainted with passion, a stranger to suffering! Joy, it is true, illumines my countenance whenever he is present, and gives my cheek a flush, which he persuades himself is that of amending health; but this only exhausts still more my enfeebled constitution, and quickens the progress of decay; for, to souls susceptible like mine, joy in excess is almost as fatal as grief.

When first we launch into life, we see only the bright side of every thing, and believe all which we wish easy of attainment. Disappointment is so far off, that we apprehend it not till it overtakes us: but, alas! the wound it then inflicts, is, I fear, incurable; and even that liveliness of temper which once made our wishes seem already accomplished, renders even our blessings painful, in the apprehension of their loss. Fearfully we then turn

back every moment, stealing on through life we hardly know how.

I told my Lord, truly told him, that I was no longer capable of happiness: yet he would believe the contrary, and never, never may he now be undeceived.

I have for some days been more than commonly low and indisposed, and wish that I was in your neighbourhood. I almost long to visit Arlington; I long to clasp to my bosom the daughters of my Lord: I would call them my own, did not I fancy them to be dearer still while appertaining wholly to him. How will all their little tremors (if such they have) vanish, when they once fix their eyes on a face that never knew how to frown on them. But Lord Westbury's pleasure must regulate mine, or rather I shall find mine in his.

Lord Westbury writes.

What a cruel little dissembler is this boasted friend of yours, Amelia—(for you

are *my* Amelia, too, now)—to bury all these wishes in her own bosom, when she so well knows that she cannot mortify me more than by suppressing any! Flattering myself that she had fallen into a slumber, I stole softly in upon her, or I should still have remained ignorant of her desires. *I* long to see my Amelia too; and though I do not long to visit Arlington, yet Arlington shall be visited forthwith: for I do most heartily long to behold my girls folded to the fair bosom which lodges my heart, nor can I allow my soul's darling to lose her first longing.

Lady Westbury writes.

Positively, my Lord, you shall surrender my pen; and if you use me with so little ceremony, I shall grow as cautious as if I had something to conceal.

Upon my word his alert Lordship gave me a pretty alarm! It was well that I had just turned my paper, for I would not have shown him the preceding page for

the fondest entreaty or sweetest smile he is master of.

The rage of impatience is on him now, I really believe! for he grudges every moment that we are to stay here. So long accustomed to execute a resolution the moment he has formed it, he never recollects that I am not equal to such expeditious proceedings. Indeed, my sweet Edward, I can neither have my clothes tumbled into the trunks any how, nor scamper away with relays, as you are accustomed to do when alone.

A variety of considerations seem to make it delicate, as well as prudent, for us to stay here some time longer. Lady Sarah Monro has not yet noticed my Lord's information of his marriage; and her regard is an object to me, though I can hardly hope to obtain it. I cannot resolve, either, to present myself in bridal pomp before the eyes of the sweet, the suffering Diana: too much have I innocently wounded her feelings already. It is likewise to be wished that my Lord and

his brother should not meet, till I and other friends can mediate between them. Lord Westbury is too incapable of offering an injury to endure one with indifference: I have never wanted influence with him but on this subject. As to the idea of Lady Sarah's displeasure, he only laughs at that; and says, that she ran away with Sir James, and married in defiance of her whole family herself.

It will, you see plainly, be the interest, and perhaps inclination, of so many to animadvert upon my conduct, that I ought not only to consider what I next do very maturely, but all that I ever did. The true art of slander lies in adhering to facts, but assigning the worst possible motive of action when the real one is unknown; and who, on this system, is secure from condemnation?

At the head of my enemies I shall find the author of half my sorrows—Lady Killarney. But her character will befriend me: and I shall limit her malevolence, by letting her understand that I have in

my power a retaliation which I should in reality disdain: I mean her narrative of her own life. I was speaking of it to my Lord, who wishes much to know how she has varnished over the disgraceful story; for I can see by his smiles that art is hers in perfection. I tell him that he ought not to peruse it, lest he should form too high an opinion of his own merit, in being able twice to charm a heart so thoroughly vitiated. He smiles contemptuously; but there is an arch sweetness at the same moment in his eyes. Ah! he is vain enough already I doubt; but who had ever so much reason?

Adieu, my dearest! You may continue to address me here; for notwithstanding all the commotion of preparation in the house, I shall not quit it yet.

Yours ever,

CECILIA WESTBURY.

LETTER CXXIV.

TO LADY HARINGTON.

Arlington Court.

IN changing my correspondent, I find hardly any change in my feelings. The same desire to unfold my heart still possesses me; the same desire that I will be minute, my friend. Yet have you well considered your request, my dear Sophia? Not a moment is there of my present life but what affords some circumstance which I wish to commemorate, and hardly can I spare one to devote to my pen. Would I could enclose my heart in this paper, and save trouble: yet that is but a breathing transcript of Lord Westbury's words or actions; and whatever relates not to him, scarce impresses its surface.

In my exhausted state we journeyed of course very slowly, and arrived here only the night before last. I say nothing

of the deplorable weather. What could that be to her who drew peace from the eye of her lover, and safety from his presence! If I now know a fear, it is lest our fate should be divided: to share that of my Edward must ever be happiness.

Scarce had I turned the lane towards the parsonage, before Amelia, my long-loved Amelia, flew towards the carriage: I half threw myself out of it to meet the heartfelt embrace. Yet I could have wrangled with her for dressing herself and her young ones to greet a friend whom fortune can neither humble nor elevate: and her best apartment, too, was prepared. I owe her a quarrel for the implicated distrust. My Lord having enjoyed the first transports of our meeting, hastened home; only desiring that I would follow him before the close of day. I spent the interval in wandering with my beloved friend through her little demesne; which had been, as I told you, the early residence of my Edward. Every object excited curiosity, surprise, delight;

every spot had been dignified with his presence, every tree had once lent him its shade. I cast my eyes on Forrester and his Amelia, and at once beheld each fairy vision of conjugal happiness, innocence, and love, realised. My friend has already given to her little home so many embellishments, that I surveyed from the windows of the parsonage the magnificent grounds of Arlington, enriched and ornamented with woods, temples, canals, and all the advantages which Art lends to Nature, without wishing for one of them.

The world would, perhaps, kindly impute my bounded ideas of beauty and happiness to my obscure origin and simple education: but far otherwise is the fact. While I really knew only an humble home and narrow circle, my aspiring mind pictured to itself all the charms of grandeur in colours too gaudy to be just. But when, after being launched into elegant life, I wandered from one splendid mansion to another, without finding a single human creature who pos-

sessed such a home able to enjoy the prodigality of fortune, I, with a corrected judgement, in the words of Shakspeare,

"Saw Content take shelter in a cottage."

Not that I childishly suppose cottagers to have the exclusive privilege of being happy!—surely not. Riches, properly employed, increase our felicity, by diffusing it; and those who have once truly known the bliss of blessing, will never limit their views to possessing a bare sufficiency for themselves. A proper reserve of the goods of life, for such as are perhaps rather less lucky than less deserving, is just the degree of external wealth which prevents poverty of mind; and, by offering a noble and natural employment for our faculties, rescues them from that lassitude and love of self which too ready a gratification of every wish is apt to produce. Lord Westbury and I have not long enough known perfect serenity, to make happiness itself a disease. My

fluctuating health, counteracting his unequalled tenderness, at present maintains that equipoise of hope and fear in both hearts which is necessary perhaps to heighten and prolong our delights.

I behold Lord Westbury as a blessing secured to me as long as I am sensible of any human good; in whose presence I shall happily live, and contentedly die. I shall not know my loss whenever we separate. Alas! dare I, then, reckon his future affliction as an enhancement of my own felicity? Yet, oh! he can but weep her dead, who became so by weeping him living!

But I have wandered indeed from my favourite parsonage. Remember that I here omit a hundred interesting anecdotes of my Amelia's little folks, as I have heard you own that you never had any taste for the frolics of the juniors: I shall only tell you that I carried off my friend and all the fairy race with me; leaving her worthy Forrester to com-

pose his Sunday's discourse in more tranquillity than he has known since the dear little incumbrances came into the world.

I saw in a moment that my Lord was but half-pleased at my long stay, though he deigned to greet me in the hall. Perhaps he imagined that it might, in the observing eyes of a train of servants, be imputed to disregard of his daughters; whereas, in reality, it proceeded from the contrary motive. Mrs. Forrester, soon after my marriage, disclosed to me some particulars which would have alarmed any step-mother but myself. The governess and attendants of these dear children had, with the destructive fondness of ignorance, instilled into their tender minds a horror of their father's second choice. At their age, impressions sink deepest; and they were prejudiced to such a degree, that Mrs. Forrester no sooner named their new mamma, than they both burst into tears. Hurt as I must be on hearing this, I resolved not to mention it to my Lord; but rather chose to take the chance

of reforming the ideas of the servants, than commence my reign by displacing them—though, *entre nous*, hardly any fault could more warrant severity; for children are incapable of just distinctions, and hardly ever truly love those whom they have first learnt to fear. How cautious, then, ought people to be of doing an injury which is often irreparable! for every action of the stranger is liable to some unhappy misconstruction. The kindest reproof, the most necessary correction—which from a mother is but a thing of course—is termed, by those who are more fond of the child than its real welfare, absolute severity from a step-mother.

What woman of common prudence would choose for herself a predicament where the utmost caution and conduct, far from obtaining praise, can hardly guard her from censure? If, to obviate ill-natured remarks, she sends the children to school—"Ah, she is not so careless of her own!" is the next observation. Great indeed must be that affection which

makes us find delight in a situation so delicate. Yet, perhaps, vanity may divide the merit with love. We are ambitious at heart of a praise which is independent of natural ties, and fondly flatter ourselves that we can fill the difficult post better than all who have gone before us. In loving our own offspring, and dedicating every faculty to forming their minds and polishing their manners, we only act up to an indispensable duty; but when the heart adopts and bestows upon the children of another the same tenderness and attention, how affecting is the compliment to the man of your choice, and how pure and lively must be the pleasure we experience!

I will not have you now advert to the fable of the cat turned into a lady, though to that and twenty other equally apt and ingenious allusions I shall undoubtedly be obvious; but, till the praises of these sage observers shall appear more valuable to me than my own, I will not yield one favourable thought of my-

self, to all they can say favourable of me.

I was willing, I own, that Lord Westbury's dear children should not see me, till they came to my arms, to my heart! I was willing to enjoy their innocent apprehension of a stranger—their fond delight on the discovery; and therefore shunned the day-light. The only servants who really knew me, James and Alton, were too well used to high life to have a memory that went beyond the moment when they thought you would approve their recollection. Perhaps my Lord was a little mortified that I did not arrive early enough to judge of the grandeur of his family-seat, which, to say truth, any one may have a pride in showing; and I have accustomed him to such an observance of his will, that a little ill-humour was on this occasion pardonable. "I had almost given over expecting you," said he in a fretful tone, while, with something less grace than usual, he presented me his hand. I remembered Solo-

mon the Wise, and gave him the mildest answer in the world, softly pressing the tendered hand. That sweet sunshine of the soul, a smile, stole into his eyes, and he at once forgot the magisterial anger which he had meditated. Having conducted me into a magnificent drawing-room which he called my own, he hastened to summon his dear girls; and I amused myself with observing from the windows the elegance of the architecture: the furniture, too, is almost regal. I would, I own, always have a country-seat of that description; and its gates, like its owner's heart, should be large and open. The rough benevolence of old English hospitality, can no longer be observed in a metropolis of the magnitude of London; but on his estate, every nobleman might always preserve the dignified cordiality of the ancient barons. Each may, if he pleases, be there a little sovereign, and have as many humble friends as he has tenants. Arlington Court is neither ancient nor modern, but enough of both to

render it striking to strangers, and comfortable to its inhabitants. Lord Westbury makes but few sacrifices to the parade of life: no man of his rank has fewer servants, yet no one was ever better served. In this, he assures me, he is not less governed by prudence and a bounded fortune, than a sense of morality: every useless domestic being, in his opinion, a theft from the state of a diligent husbandman or ingenious artificer. The servants whom his father left, still remain in the family, and are chiefly pensioned on this estate. They all maintain the love which they bore him in his boyish days, blended with the reverence that he inspires without demanding it.

The delight these domestics felt, to find that their Lord had at last a lady with whom he was entirely happy, who thought that place he best loved the most lovely, disposed the honest men to greet me with eager respect. I soon saw the joy which Lord Westbury's return here diffused, and that I was adored as its cause. Every

worthy grey-headed soul flies impatiently to serve me, and seems over-paid with a kind word or a smile.

Lord Westbury now entered, and never appeared to more advantage than with a lovely daughter in each hand. The little tremblers were formally dressed for the occasion, and approached me without raising their eyes. I flew to clasp them to my heart.—"Beloved children, do you not know me?" cried I. They started at my voice, clasped their hands together in token of joy and surprise, and exclaimed,—"Ah, my dear, dear governess, how glad am I to see you! where have you been this long, long while?" These children, to whom my heart ever turned so fondly, being now in a manner wholly my own, oppressed it with a sensation composed of every thing tender. I disengaged myself from their dear little arms, to throw mine around the author of their being and my happiness, while I wept forth my delight and gratitude on his bosom. Lord Westbury was hardly less disordered

than myself; often kissing my cheek, his became wet with my tears; and pressing me to his generous heart, he inarticulately repeated—"My soul's best treasure! ever, ever may they merit this affecting tenderness!" The children, in the interim, clinging to us both, began to weep for company, inquiring "What was the matter with their dear little governess?" I soon found that they knew not my new appellation, and gave me the one which I had in fondness taught them. I gave my Lord a sign to leave Nature to her own operations, and sat down with a child in each rich hand:—"And have you always loved and remembered me, my darlings?" cried I.—"Oh, yes: that we have!" replied the grave Louisa; "and we used to pray for you every night of our lives: but we thought that you were an angel in heaven along with poor mamma!" Again I embraced the precious innocents, and blessed them with my tears. "But where," resumed Louisa, half in a whisper, and throwing her arms

round my neck, "is my new mamma? We have got fine new frocks and sashes, you see; but I wish I never had had another mamma for all that!"—"And why so, Louy?" said her father, with quickness.—"Oh, papa! I must not tell you; I know you will be angry: but I will whisper my own dear little governess. They say that she will be cross to us, and bring us little brothers, and put our noses out of joint; and then papa will not love us either."—"No," rejoined Henrietta with lisping eagerness; "nor she will not buy us any fine clothes, nor take us out in the coach; so pray do you stay with us for ever and ever, and do not let her have us."—I saw that Lord Westbury comprehended at once how the children came by this prejudice, and am much mistaken if he pardon those about them.—"You shall be my mamma," said the sweet Henrietta with her usual *naïveté*, and laying her head on my bosom; "and when I go to bed, you will, may be, lay your head on the pillow, and kiss

me, and sing to me, and cry over me, as you used to do, and I will be very, very good; and always look like my papa whenever you bid me."—Could Lord Westbury forbear laughing out at a stroke which at once showed him the strength of my passion, even from its commencement, and the simplicity of his darling, who always looks like him without being bid to do so? He pressed my hand, and the eloquent silence of our over-wrought sensibility was again interrupted by both the children, who demanded if I would be their mamma? affectingly adding, "You know that we have no mamma now!"—"I *am* your mamma, dearest of children!" cried I: "and the fondest you ever had."—"This *is* your new mamma!" re-echoed their father, observing their little distrustful eyes: "and the only one whom you ever will have," added he, fondly clasping the whole group and caressing us all by turns.

If there live a being that could hear or see this scene unmoved, who would

envy his insensibility? and little as you love children, even your heart, my dear Sophia, must have melted at beholding us. Let it reconcile you to the situation you so fretfully complain of. Children! —we should be too happy did their existence cost us no suffering, since the very first glance we cast upon their little faces obliterates the remembrance of it. Think, if thus my heart expanded over the daughters of my Lord, what would have been my sensations had he owed them to myself! Take courage, my dear, and remember how many seem blest in being mothers, who hardly know another blessing. Heaven has graciously ordained that children shall mostly arrive at the time when the peace of possession has subjected the heart to a languor often fatal to our happiness. These innocent objects awaken a new and milder affection in both parents, which rather strengthens than interferes with the impassioned tenderness they bear towards each other. It is the pleasure of a mo-

ther's days to rear the breathing blessing—to bestow on its ripening mind all the little knowledge which she has amassed, and the thousand interesting caresses which would perhaps weary its father. He—delighted to find a dear little third being, uniting at once their names, natures, and views—no longer wants a just object for his cares, or a spring for his activity. New duties entwine themselves with the increase, and new joys endear the duties. Parental exertions thus happily employ the youth of both parties; and in seeing it blossom anew in their children, they half-forget the loss in themselves. Look among those who call matrimony a galling chain, and you will mostly find the complainants to be persons who have no tender infants to wreath it with flowers. It is from the want of natural occupations, that the heart is so often palled into indifference or corroded to disgust.....Am I not a good creature to endeavour thus to reconcile you to enduring a little suffering with patience,

when it will give so many people pleasure?

I confess that I should never hope long to attach my husband, but by thus making myself a mother, if God does not think proper to make me one; and if I may not hope it, who may?—for who had ever such reason to know herself to be the object of the purest and most ardent affection? What could Lord Westbury gain in obtaining me, but a fond and faithful heart, devoted to every duty, and bound up in himself? Yet for me he relinquished a bride, lovely, rich, and noble: one by whom he knew himself beloved, and to whom he could have been attached. Greatly am I sensible of the sacrifice, and my gratitude is proportioned; though Heaven forbid *that* feeling should ever become predominant in my bosom!

Gratitude is, perhaps, among those sentiments which ought to be expressed only by our actions. Subordination is ever painful; and in dwelling on obli-

gations, do we not meanly imply that the obliger is gratified by the acknowledgement? which is of all affronts the most poignant. No: independence of spirit is an attribute of love; and though to be Lord Westbury's choice leaves me without a wish, I rather thank Heaven than himself, which, by inseparably combining our hearts, left the poor advantage of fortune out of the question.

I omitted to tell you how affected my dear Amelia was with our domestic interview. She is a mother, and exquisitely alive to the pleasures comprised in that name: and these sweet girls are beloved by every body. I assure you we had a very gay evening among our young ones: my hair and my Lord's suffered a little it is true; but I do not think that he ever knew before how captivating children could be; neither did I know what a charming child he could make. Ah! how delightful is it to have the playful little creatures climbing about you, and entwining their soft and snowy arms

around your neck, like the tendrils of the vine!—to watch their flights, their pursuits, their tiffs, and reconciliations! With what an endearing confidence do they fly to us for safety, their little eyes beaming transparent brightness, and their cheeks enlivened with a glow as delicate as it is deep!

You will scold, I know, should I be silent about my health. If I am better, it is so very little that I can hardly be certain of it. We had a consultation of physicians, in our way here, at Bath; but, to own the truth, I rather asked their advice to avoid any wrong measures, than from the idea of recovering by their means. They all, however, agreed, that vegetable diet, riding on horseback, pure air, and an easy mind, are the remedies on which I must rely. They would, indeed, have sent me abroad, but this I positively rejected; and though I did not assign that reason, I refused upon my Lord's account. What cruelty would it be for me to tear him from his duties, his

home—those dear and habitual claims and connexions which must, should he be destined early to lose me, become his consolations! Who would then anxiously watch over his health, or by soothing his anguish steal into his confidence? Besides, in the interim to be vapoured to death with doctors, apothecaries, and nurses!—No; I will never monopolise Lord Westbury to make him wretched! If I cannot recover in this sweet place, I never shall. The weather, I am sorry to say, decides my state:—a clear day revives, and a cloudy one depresses me. You have, perhaps, found out that this is the former.

Happily I am at liberty to proceed, respecting the recovery of my health, according to my own opinion; for my Lord is a sceptic concerning the practical part of physic, if the malady has become complicated, or is not strong enough to ascertain itself. That which is caused by an aching heart, can, in my judgement, only be cured by an easy one.

I hope that Captain Percival sets a due value on my little handmaid, Sally. I miss the worthy creature every hour; yet never think of her without fancying that the anxiety I felt to ascertain her happiness, by some means unknown to myself accelerated my own.

Adieu!

LETTER *CXXV.

TO LADY HARINGTON.

Arlington Court.

AH, my dear Sophia! has Lady Diana been so rash, so mistaken, so unfortunate! Could such a mind allow despair so great an ascendancy over it, as to gratify the vanity and ambition of her parents by the total sacrifice of herself! I feel as if I had occasioned the error which I lament. But was there, then, no alternative between Lord Westbury and the Duke of Fernham? Alas! it is too often the

misfortune of our sex to punish our own hearts for having made an unhappy first choice, by letting the second be contemptible. Women know not how to form a subordinate scheme of felicity. All our hopes rest on the first; and falling with it, we often destine ourselves to be wretched because we have failed to be happy, as if no medium were permitted by Providence. But am I not, like the interesting victim, thoughtless and rash, in thus arraigning the least faulty person? Ah, should the Duchess of Fernham hereafter depart from rectitude, amidst the reproaches with which her parents would not fail to overwhelm her, what could they answer were she but to say, "You first violated your own duty in claiming an unlimited right over mine! Your pride, superior to every other feeling, found the partiality which was sanctioned by yourselves a crime, the moment that it became hopeless. To whom must I ascribe a life thus prolonged in disappointment, shame, and sorrow? Instead of reproaching, give

me, if you can, a recompense for my innocence and my peace!" No: the parents want feeling to say this to themselves, and their charming daughter has too much ever to say it to them. Alas! more than deprived of the delights of society, she is the slave of its evils. Too deeply have I known both, not to feel for her.

I thought it best not to notice this information to my Lord, who was abroad when your letter arrived; but he came immediately up to me, and soon perceived that I had been weeping. He knew how to extort the cause from me; but a gravity so profound seized on him, that I could not avoid feeling a secret sense of humiliation and sadness which I had never known before. It was not anger; it could not be jealousy: in short, I can only tell you that it was a very odious sensation. You will think me weak, but do not call me so: when I have chid myself, I can never endure to be chidden by others. It could only be his silence that

distressed me. If he felt merely compassion, how little must he believe my heart to be, could he think it were not touched with the same sentiment!

Alas! I fear that Lord Westbury spoils me, and I grow captious. I see, upon reflexion, his conduct in a juster light: it was natural and noble! A narrow mind would have dissembled its chagrin, a vain one would have pitied Lady Diana: one which was generous alone would show, even in silence, a deep and tender sympathy. It is my duty immediately to correct my fault, while, by insinuating myself into his confidence, I leave him the less to regret in having resigned her. He is coming through the garden, and seems to have recovered his serenity. His lovely girls run to him; they twine their arms around his, in fond supplication: the eyes of all three are raised to my windows. Dear children! they are soliciting him to bring them to me, and he invites me to join their party. Yes, beloved Westbury! thy conscious

faulty Cecilia is impatient to obey thee. Ah! can a heart devoted like mine, claim a merit in obedience? Is it not our noblest, sweetest enjoyment?

I am so amended since last I wrote, that I now begin to hope for recovered health; and life is too much endeared for me not to covet it. But is it possible that days like those which I have known, can continue? If indeed such happiness can be permanent, how little do we owe to the monitors who warn us of its transitory nature, teaching us to languish under the apprehension of an evil that may never reach us! Keep your predictions, cruel speculators, to yourselves. Few misfortunes have been avoided by knowing that others have sunk under them: for, such is the error of custom, or the ordination of Providence, that reflexion is much apter to follow action, than to precede it.

That the Duke of Fernham should take a fancy to Miss Frazier, is quite in the order of things; but that his bride should add to her misfortunes a com-

panion so malignant and insipid, is too grievous. If my name should ever occur, I know your partiality will induce you to counteract the odious impression which your cousins will give of me to the sweet Diana.

Excuse me, my dear, for making so free with your relations: were there any affinity between your souls, I could only delight in them. One cousin, however, you have, who is worthy the honour:—what is become of him? Poor Percival! I still, my Lord says, have a mighty good-will to him! Be sure and let him know it: the afflicted heart sometimes construes into neglect even a slight omission. Be cautious and attentive—nay, be kind to him—if not for his own sake, for mine. I have the vanity to ally my heart to his with a fraternal affection.

Your desiring me to quit Orange Hill in the elegant condition in which I found it, is an instance of your own consideration, but a reflexion on mine. I was merely a guest there; all within it is

yours; and the presenting the furniture to Captain Percival will do me a very sensible pleasure. If my concurrence should, either in law or politeness, be necessary, you will have the goodness to inform me.

Tell Captain Percival that he must not take a bachelor's freedom, and demolish all the neat elegance of his house; for I have such a predilection for that and its environs, as may often tempt me to borrow it when he is away. If I may add another request, it is that my poor Sally and her husband may remain in his service till I can find a better prospect for them. She is an invaluable creature; and Joseph, honest and useful.

Adieu!—All regard to Sir George.

LETTER *CXXVI.

TO LADY HARINGTON.

YOURS, my dear Sophia, entertained both my Lord and self. How is it, that with so much wit you are never ill-natured?

Had I heard any thing from Sir James and Lady Sarah Monro, I should certainly have informed you. Ah, no: their prejudices respecting birth and fortune, with perhaps a partial preference of Lord Winchester's lovely daughter, must make my marriage odious to them. Even if they mean to decide hereafter more dispassionately, they will, it is obvious, wait for the report of the public: and who is spoken universally well of, when suddenly elevated in situation? Should a total alienation and coldness ensue, it would sensibly chagrin me. I once had a considerable share of Lady Sarah's good

graces: it would be strange, if my having acquired a claim to them should be the very cause of her withdrawing the distinction.

The countenance and friendship of relations has one great advantage in silencing the ill-natured suppositions of the world, by determining all those persons in your favour who have no fixed rule of judging, and never think any thing right in which a whole family do not concur. Do these persons ever consider how hard it is to bring so many tempers, interests, and feelings, to one point?

Mr. Clifford, I have reason to apprehend, will be inveterate in his hatred: he, of course, meanly concludes that I cannot forgive, from knowing that he could not were he in the same situation. His brother's just resentment he will represent to his relations as proceeding from the influence of his low-born bride: nor will he once allow them to guess, that the very insignificant in question might have owed the name of Clifford to himself, had she not

preferred to that honour a precarious employment, and the invaluable heart of Lord Westbury.

I have not forgotten your request, my dear Sophia, but I owe it to myself and my Lord to send you a more true detail of his youth than I could formerly gather from Mrs. Ellison. I have recovered the original story from Mrs. Forrester, and was perusing it one day, when, on being suddenly called away, I left it on my desk. My Lord happened to cast his eye upon the name of Dr. Leslie, and sat down—(Curious enough! you will say; but I spoil him, and do not keep my keys as you do yours)—to run over the whole. Not all the flattery he treated me with, consoled me for his having read the scrawl; though he assured me that I had one excellent qualification for an historian, in so often discerning the cause through the effects. However, he pointed out many errors, and has promised me a full relation of the facts, provided I will indulge him with perusing my amended manu-

script. Assure yourself that I shall gladly bestow every leisure hour on so pleasing an employment.

Have I not already made you intimate with Mrs. Forrester? How often have I called you Amelia!—how often have I addressed her as Sophia!

You, who insist that there lives not on earth a pair of married lovers attached with a delicacy like that of Lord Westbury and your Cecilia, come and see Mr. and Mrs. Forrester! Though united at an early age, and living on a mere pittance, love matured their minds, reason bounded their wishes, and an exquisite refinement marked their manners. Mr. Forrester, alive to every duty, passes a part of each day in visiting his parishioners; and sometimes dispensing spiritual, sometimes bodily aid. Thus, whenever he returns, it is to find in his home a relaxation—in its dear inhabitants a reward! Nothing, he says, can surpass the happiness of an honest industrious labourer by his humble fire-side: and why

may not his superior attain the same felicity? He maintains, that to activity of body we must be indebted for rest; and to exerted virtue for the comforts of social life.

Amelia, always the wife and mother, makes no distinction between the duties, save that she gives only the hours of her husband's absence exclusively to his children. "He is their father," she urges, "and entitled to the preference. But for him I had never experienced the throbbing pleasures of maternal love; but for my children, I should never have known half the virtues of their father. Shall I grant most of my indulgence, then, to those who can least enjoy, least repay it?" Yet is Mrs. Forrester the fondest of mothers.

Adieu!

LETTER *CXXVII.

TO LADY HARINGTON.

Arlington.

THE repose I promised to myself is already disturbed by this royal visitation. My Lord tells me that his appearance at Court is indispensable, and I shall be wanting to myself if I am not previously presented. To this, what can I answer? Have I, indeed, a choice, when I can have no judgement? Sometimes I think that he is too much influenced by the modes of life; at others, that he is unwilling to give the tattling part of the town leisure to prepossess the rest against me. Whatever Lord Westbury's motive for this unwelcome urgency may be, he is so often in the right that I ought implicitly to obey him. Yet, to a heart delicate, reserved, and haughty, how irksome must it be thus to make a bold

plunge into life! to assert an absolute claim to those distinctions which it least values, as if impatient to obtain them! to encounter all Lord Westbury's relations, while considered and even treated by them as worse than a stranger—an intruder!—while my little history, with every addition which malice or ingenuity can invent, is yet the news of the day! —in fluctuating health—wholly uncountenanced!

Yet am I not ungrateful in thus saying? Is not the most amiable of mankind—him for whom I am thus talked of, hated, censured, envied—ready to stand forth the protector of my person, my heart, my reputation?—ready to conduct the creature of his bounty (for such would I ever be thought) with pride even to the foot of the throne! there, even there, glorying in his humble choice!—Rest, then, too timid Cecilia! rest secure in the merit which Lord Westbury reflects on thee; nor allow thy too exquisite sensibility to refine into a fault! It is thy

duty implicitly to obey him who delights to distinguish thee!

The Trevilians are not yet come, and Mrs. Trevilian's judgement is to decide the important question as to my appearance, for she lives in and for the world: yet she pleases Lord Westbury, who is impatient to introduce us to each other. Her praise, he assures me, will, in a certain circle, fix my estimation, for her judgement is allowed to be a criterion. Perhaps her friendship for the Duchess of Fernham makes him anxious that I should attach her; for I find the Winchester family humble themselves, by reflecting upon my Lord. I shall not fail to exert myself to please every friend of his; yet is it not melancholy to observe, that merit, like gold, is never current till it has received the stamp of some idol of fashion, at the moment sovereign of taste? How infinite is that privilege! To be able, by a word, to decide the degree of approbation due to the unknown!—Yet surely it is cruel to oblige those regulated minds who fix a

standard for their own moderate acceptation in life, to owe even that to the caprice of an equal!—nay, often to reduce such individuals to purchase, by little sacrifices and poor adulation, even what they have a right to demand: and if they are either unwilling or unable to pay the price, how many ways have those who extort it to prejudice society at large! Is there a dubious incident in the lives of your parents, or a mortifying one in your own, how well is it remembered, and how ingeniously is it circulated! Whereas, if any honourable occurrence is to be found in your little history, its authenticity is either questioned, or some motive assigned for it which is utterly degrading. Thus, "damned with faint praise," and bitter compassion, you are left to buffet alone the fluctuating tide of public opinion; against which, the more intrinsic the worth the less the opposition; for disgust too easily inclines the consciously-upright mind to seek in itself that approbation which it no longer dares hope

from the world. Is it not thus that those who might most embellish society are often wholly lost to it?

Were I to be wholly frank, I should tell you that even my Lord's panegyrics have failed to impress me as to this all-deciding Mrs. Trevilian. Wit is not a female characteristic, for it rarely dwells with either sensibility or delicacy. To give effect to its sallies, it must be frequently almost necessary to step beyond that intuitive and exquisite reserve which sets the proper boundary between the sexes. I know even you will think me suddenly grown arrogant, to venture all this against Lord Westbury's judgement; but allow, my dear, for the prejudices of his birth and manners. To the *nonchalance* of women of condition he is accustomed; and though he does not consider it as a fault, it is certain that he thinks being without it an advantage; at least, as the object of his choice, I am entitled to draw this inference. Yet I never was among those who admire your fluttering fluttered

ladies: no; there is a certain degree of self-possession necessary to show your real advantages; but let it be delicate, let it be feminine, let it be every thing by implication. A demand even of our rights is, in a female, an indecorum; but to be watching for the applause of a circle—— Oh, my dear! let men be wits, while happier women are their modest judges!

Since I must go to town on this occasion, you, I suppose, will do the same, and keep me in countenance. Should you delay, you know the consequence. The hoops of modern times are not so happily contrived as those of the chaste court of our famous queen Elizabeth, for hiding the incidental defects of shape in maids of honour. To defer the evil day, therefore, will not avail you; and methinks, when one must look foolish, it is some consolation to see a friend look as foolish as oneself.

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I was summoned from my pen to take my ride. I now grow quite a proficient in

the art of horsemanship, and am extremely fond of the exercise, as well as of the beast that carries me. In truth, though I would not emulate the Roman emperor who made his horse a consul, and fed him with gilt oats, I am rather anxious that mine should have plenty of oats ungilt; and, could he talk, should certainly inquire into the secrets of the stable, if I did not make him absolutely my companion. My Lord at first flattered me out of my fears, as we do children into taking physic, by not seeming to see the wry faces they are making. You have no conception how I trembled; and indeed I expected to drop off every moment. Lord Westbury paced slowly by my side, while a groom led my palfrey, as if I had been a princess in romance wandering in a desert. Half a mile was the extent of my tour; but I now make the circuit of the park, and canter very boldly.

At first I was a phænomenon. Not a cot which did not send forth all its inhabitants, from the child hanging over the

sliding board at the door, to the silver-headed gran'am spinning in her wicker chair by the chimney corner, to peep at my Lady. Two rustic feasts, which we have given to the neighbourhood, have a little satiated their curiosity; and as this was a new custom, they consider themselves as indebted to me only for the indulgence. Ah, how easy is it to gain the very hearts of those so much below you! A kind inquiry to the old, a friendly admonition to the young, a tender caress to the infant, a general recollection of them all, has a charm for which one cannot account. How slowly must the distinctions of society have gained ground, yet how firmly are they now established! The setting sun appears a less striking object to common persons than a fine carriage; yet is their sense of admiration probably as lively as our own, although taste has not directed it to a right object.

It is often said, that, to judge of the poor, we ought ourselves to have been in their condition. I, who have been but

little above it, might be entitled to an opinion, but that my mind was early cultivated. As far, however, as my bounded observation goes, I should say that the faults which philosophers impute to the rich and informed part of society, run in some degree through the whole of it, and are only rendered remarkable in the higher ranks by circumstances. I have never seen a vice or a folly in one class of mankind, which I could not equally discover in another; and, bold as it may seem in these times of progressive improvement to make such a declaration, I cannot but apprehend that our imperfect attempts to polish rustics rather weakens than strengthens their principles (that great object of all our efforts), by giving them a vague consciousness of intellectual powers which they know not how properly to apply, and would never, but for their kind and mistaken instructors, have thought that they possessed.

I know not when charity-schools were first instituted. Probably by the monks,

for children of ability, whom they meant to unite with themselves in course of time. The same policy, from another motive, might cause these establishments to increase at the Reformation: and at the Revolution they became universal, merely, as I apprehend, to give the poor in general one fixed mode of thinking on religious points. So far they seem a benefit to society: but when those who liberally extend plans of this kind, are not satisfied with simplifying religion and virtue to the many, but become intent on cultivating powers which are weak in the wisest, and often more than weak, dangerous, in the ignorant, may they not do more harm than good? The limited acquirements the poor are able to make, may easily take from them that happy ignorance by which they were reconciled to the painful subordination and labour their benefactors cannot exempt them from; but what adequate substitute can the poor find for unreflecting content in their small portion of knowledge? An outrageous vanity, which leads to a sub-

version of order, often grounds itself in persons who are half-instructed. Overbearing, from the very little they know, to those who know nothing, they begin to fancy their abilities superior to the common occupations, which alone can enrich a state or preserve its freedom. The husbandman or artificer has, by this means, often acquired an idea of being a gentleman; and soon, that he may see the world, becomes, what is not so remote from that character in reality as in name, a footman. This amusing way of life being subjected to frequent change, men so situated cannot fulfil another duty by marrying, and learn to laugh at all who do. As they witness immoral excesses of every kind, they soon discover that they have a more ample power of indulging in such than their masters have; and are not unfrequently surrounded by as many mistresses as there are female servants in the family. How often do we find the latter, who are rendered by situation dreadful victims in society, driven to strangle, at the

moment of their birth, the offspring of such illicit connexions! and even if the infants, through the mother's pity or her fears, should survive, she with them is excluded from the pale of moral existence; and the hand of the executioner too frequently takes from the little wretch, brought up in infamy, that life which its miserable mother spared.

Had, on the contrary, these half-informed, presuming peasants never been led, by a mistaken calculation of their own acquirements and abilities, to emerge from the humble cot where they earned and ate the bread of innocence, they would not have despised the parents who gave them being, for not knowing what they were never taught, but, like those parents, have continued honest, hardy, and laborious—poor, it is true, but accustomed to be so; and poverty becomes an evil only by comparison.

If in these remarks you discern any severity, cast your eyes among your own male servants, as I do on mine, and you

will acquit me. I really have learned to consider it as a sin to keep more men in that capacity than are indispensable; and always prefer such as are married.

On consideration, I think that I should rather recommend what I have written to Sir George's notice than yours; for he, I remember, encourages that restless spirit of improvement in his humble tenants which I have ventured to question. Not that I can allow you for one moment to imagine that I would circumscribe the brightest ray of the divine nature which is sometimes seen in man, called genius. Ah, who does not adore it! But intellect is a gem which forces its way, my dear, through the coarsest earth; while, scattered upon the surface, we pick up a vast variety of counterfeits, and such are often held up for general admiration. Ambition is a much more universal failing than we suppose, who confine it to the objects and persons above us; and I fear that it is only governable when hopeless. If so, none but the lowest of mankind can be wholly with-

out it. That "glorious fault of angels and of gods," is the most incurable of the many which now infect and disgrace civil society. How it would please me to find you have been induced by this dissertation to dismiss some of your men-servants; nay, even to send home only your footboy, to follow the plough, before he has learned to think himself above the employment.

LETTER *CXXVII.

TO MRS. FORRESTER.

WHEN will wonder be absorbed in habit? When shall I have done with that worn-out question to my own heart, "Can this be possible?". Once more do I find myself in the house where my soul first awakened to being. Every room, and every object, most impressively recals the past to my memory. Seated in this apartment, where I once was ac-

customed to see a lovely, though not a blameless, trifler, I dread the infection of her failings, and make it the school of my heart. I cannot raise my eyes to the glass, which reaches almost from the ceiling to the floor, without seeming to view the fair creature whom it has so often reflected. Fancy now depicts her, pale, cold, wrapped in the garments of the grave; while I, for a while, glide about in her place, adorned with equal splendor.

I am sometimes so oppressed with these dismal images as to be obliged to intrude upon my Lord, in what ought to be his sanctuary, the library; but when there, I find myself ashamed to tell him why I came. Pleased to think that I cannot live one hour without him, he takes my hand, places me by his side, and even while he speaks the cheerfulness of my soul returns. My fond heart overswells with Lord Westbury; yet the fear of being troublesome makes me withdraw, although I feel a reluctance even stronger

than that of love. Time and custom will, no doubt, subdue my painful sensibility, and this house be to me no more than another. Ah! wherefore should it now? Did I encroach on her rights? No wonder that I never dared to be guilty, when innocence itself hardly satisfies my conscience.

Had his Henrietta felt the same impulse, how happy might she have been! Rich in his early love, possessing at once the blossom and the first-fruit of his heart, hers would have been a fate which angels might have envied. Even then, it is true, I should have distinguished him; but reason, in a moment, would have corrected the vain, the guilty presumption. My weak heart gave itself up to the predilection, only from being convinced that he had no happiness at home. I should then, perhaps, have married some one in my own rank of life, and both would have been guiltless, both might have been happy. Yet, oh! so fondly does my soul cleave to him to

whom I have given my hand, that hardly should I think I had gained him at too high a price, though my life were to be the forfeit: and in reflecting on all I have suffered for his sake, I have the sweet consolation of thinking that I have thus deserved (the only way in which I could deserve him) even Lord Westbury.

Mrs. Trevilian made our journey to town very cheerful and agreeable. She continues to show me the same obliging attention; and so intimate are we now with each other, that there is nothing of friendship wanting between us but the reality. Accustomed to be the moving principle, the wonder, of a mixed society, Mrs. Trevilian becomes cold and vacant in a *tête-à-tête.* I find myself always chilled when alone with her; and cannot conquer a reserve that insensibly siezes me, only because I find hers to be unconquerable. Yet she seems to speak whatever arises in her mind; but it is with a frigidity of tone and manner which shows that she feels not the want of a friend, even at the moment

she makes you most sensible of it. She is so vain of the boundless adoration of her husband, that you might sometimes mistake vanity for reciprocal love; but the moment either consequence, comfort, or indulgence, is in question, you plainly see that it is Mr. Trevilian's lady who engrosses all her thoughts. Yet is she happy, from never having discovered how to be happier; and that animation to which a circle can add, we may always obtain: though to see the animation of the woman whom I loved, diminish with the circle, would terribly mortify me, were I married to her. Yet Mrs. Trevilian has one great merit, and no great fault: she is a faithful, prudent wife, to a man old enough to be her father.

Ridicule is too often the concomitant of wit, for Mrs. Trevilian to be without it. Where any person whom she dislikes is in question, she unites those two qualities in a high degree. In short, the most favourable thing I can afford to say of her is, that, by the good luck of having pleased

her, I have escaped making an enemy, rather than gained a friend. Lady Harington and she will assimilate at once; and I expect Sophia in town to-morrow.

Lord Westbury, perceiving the involuntary coldness of his Cecilia towards this great favourite of his, banters me on being a miser of my mind, and hardly suffering any one to know the extent of my treasure. I answer in the same strain, that few bestow time and patience enough to get at it, though he did; and that I cannot studiously display my natural character before the wondering eyes of every accidental visitor, as the side-board of family plate is shown off in the houses of some of our country friends.

Mr. Trevilian and I, however, associate with all the ease and satisfaction that my Lord could wish. No human being was ever more frank and good humoured, though there mixes in his character a surprising degree of credulity for a man who has lived freely. A passionate attachment to his lady was the means of recall-

ing him to propriety before the imputation of necessity took from him the merit of inclination. No wonder, then, that he saw Lord Westbury's supposed disgraceful choice with concern, and sought to guide his heart to Lady Diana Selwyn. The worthy man fancied that, I believe, to be among those things which a woman could not pardon. He now judges me more truly. I honour the assiduity with which he studied to destroy me, because he, unlike the base Clifford, acted from the leading motive of my own life, the sole wish of rendering my Lord innocent and happy.

Sir George Harington and Mr. Trevilian are old acquaintance, and part of a set which Time has either reformed or claimed as his own. Trevilian is, nevertheless, as much younger than Sir George as he is older than my Lord. Those gentlemen were delighted at meeting in a social circle again, and have, I am sorry to add, too perfect and pleasant a recollection of the days which they formerly passed

together. Perhaps they only repeat their odd stories to show their wives the merit of their present conduct. Lord Westbury laughs freely with them, but never turns the attention on himself by one such recital; though I am apt to conclude, that, with his advantages, he must have met with adventures quite as entertaining. It is happy for me that he does not commemorate his exploits; for, were I the wife of a gentleman who did, I should not fully rely on his reformation, which evidently had not reached the heart.

A-propos—Mr. Clifford has taken a house near us, till the one which he has bought in Bath is furnished and ready. I have not yet met with him; which is the more extraordinary, as I am abroad almost continually, being now so expert a rider as to figure away in Hyde Park. My Lord is good enough, generally, to escort me himself, but yesterday Mr. Trevilian did me that honour. I set the dear girls down at Kensington Gardens, where the groom attended my coming,

and I was mounting my horse, while the children were kissing their hands to me from the coach-door, when I perceived that I had excited the curiosity of a lady who drove by me in a chariot. The arms and livery were those of Lady Sarah Monro. An incivility so obvious both shocked and disconcerted me; yet, recollecting the absence of my Lord, I resolved not to appear to know an affront which he would not, perhaps, forgive.

I was far from well, and slumbered on the sofa after dinner in my dressing-room, while my Lord answered a letter. I was afterwards hastening to rejoin him, when, on the stairs, I met Lady Sarah Monro's woman. She could not but know me, and I her, for she had formerly been the messenger of many civilities to me and Lord Westbury's daughters. A consciousness of some kind of detection was visible on her features: she blushed, retreated, and very faintly stammered out that she was overjoyed to see my Ladyship, and to find that I did her the ho-

nour to recollect her: she only came to see Mrs. James. This reiterated assurance joined with her needless confusion to suggest to me that Lady Sarah had poorly condescended thus to inform herself of my character and conduct. By such people is your Cecilia, then, to be judged;—by those whose praises she could buy, were she able to resolve on not deserving them; and may, perhaps, lose by obstinately adhering to an integrity which she haughtily requires of herself.

I am very sensible that Lord Westbury's relations are doubly provoked at his marriage; nor is it so much the disadvantages of her whom he has chosen, as the advantages of her whom he forsook, that quicken their displeasure. I learnt this from himself. "Can you, my love," cried he, "be offended with my family for imputing the want of a fortune like Lady Diana's to you as a fault, since in their eyes it is the chief distinction of that lovely creature? Let not such a narrowness of soul affect for a moment a being

whom God has eminently gifted and informed. Could Sir James, and his weak wife, know the disdain with which such a mode of thinking and acting inspires me, they would spare themselves the trouble of rendering their little spleen so obvious. If, after what I now have said, I see a trace of anxiety on my Cecilia's brow, I shall be obliged, however unwillingly, to conclude that my approbation, esteem, and love, are unfortunately too little for her happiness." Think whether this has not rendered me dumb on that subject for ever.

Adieu! I hear the servant of Mrs. Trevilian shaking the house with a kind of "earthly thunder."

END OF VOL. IV.

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